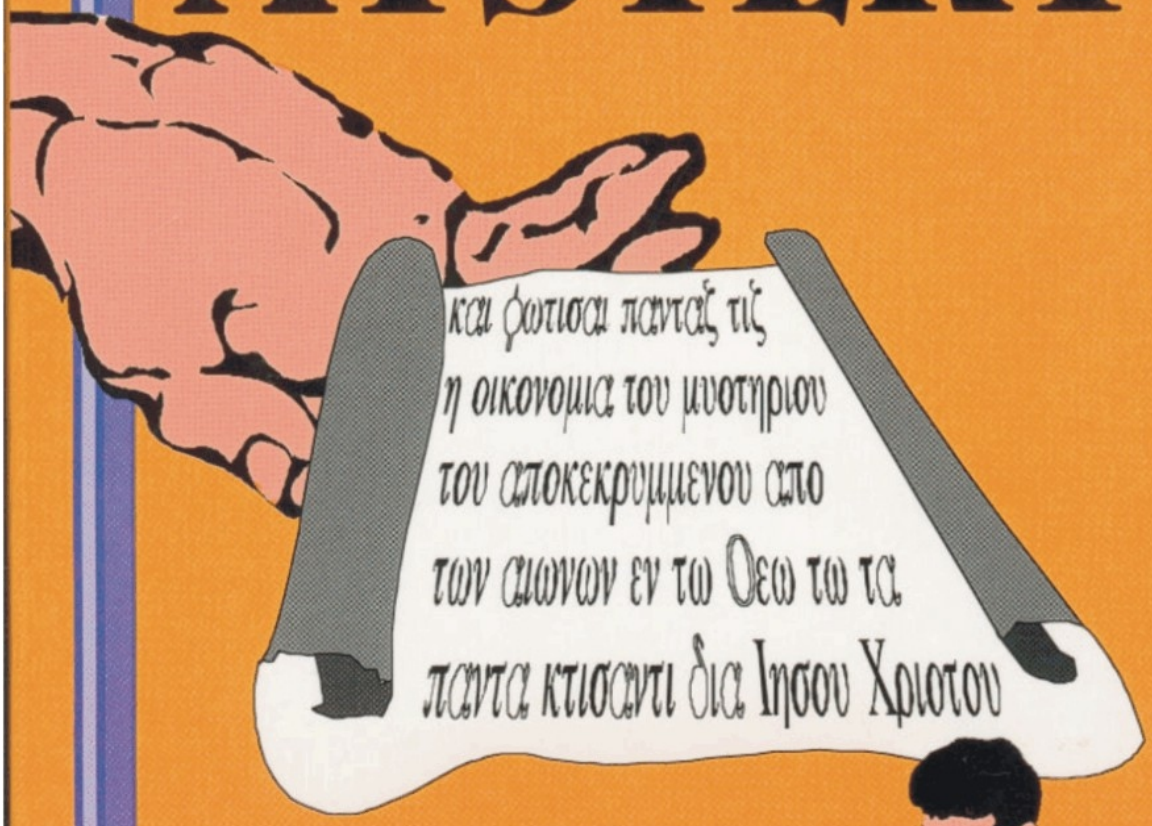
The MYSTERY



Joel Finck

THE MYSTERY

The Key to the Bible

By

Pastor Joel Finck

A
GRACE BIBLE CHURCH
PUBLICATION

THE MYSTERY
The Key to the Bible

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Rapid City, South Dakota 57702

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Manuscript prepared by *Karen Toussaint*
Typeset by *Jan Bultema*
Cover Design by *Timothy McGarvey*
Printed in the USA by *Bible Doctrines Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

Dedication

To my beloved wife, Linda, who truly came to see the Mystery at the same time as I. Without her fellowship and encouragement, it may have been a lonely journey indeed.

Pastor Joel Finck
Rapid City, South Dakota
1997

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CHAPTER ONE

THE MYSTERY...The Key to the Bible

> *"To make all men see what is the fellowship of the Mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:9).*

One of the classic questions in the Word of God is the one Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch as he went to meet him. The Holy Spirit sent Philip down to Gaza to find a certain man, and the Scripture says that Philip ran to meet this man's chariot. When he noted him reading from the scroll of Isaiah, he asked this immortal question: "Understandeth thou what thou readest?"

This is one of the most important questions that we can ask those who read the Bible. “Do I really understand what I am reading? Do I really understand what God is trying to tell me, what He is trying to teach me?” And if they are honest, there are many people who would have to answer much like the Ethiopian eunuch answered, "How can I understand except some man should guide me."

The purpose of this study is to give you some Bible study helps right from the Scriptures so that you might better understand the Word of God. Unfortunately, today many people have lost interest in the Bible. There are many reasons for this, but perhaps one of the greatest reasons is because they tried reading it once or twice but it just didn’t make sense. They found what appeared to be contradictions and perhaps they were overwhelmed by it all and just gave up. If only there were a key that would unlock the pages of Scripture and help us understand what it is talking about. Well, there is a key. The Bible itself tells us how we can understand Scripture.

Three Basic Premises

This study will be based on three premises. The *first* premise is this: The Bible can be understood. This should be obvious, yet there are those who think that the Bible really is impossible to understand. Yet, if God went to the trouble of revealing to us His Word, you would think that He meant for us to understand it, wouldn't you? And indeed, that is the case. God wants us to understand His Word.

Secondly, the Bible is for believers. Actually this second statement qualifies the first. When we say the Bible can be understood, we must qualify this by saying

God intended you to understand it as a believer. Many people who try to read the Word of God are yet unsaved as they endeavor to do so. If you are unsaved, if you have never trusted in Christ, you are going to find it very difficult to understand the Word of God. Why is this? The Bible itself tells us in I Corinthians 2:14 - "But the natural man (meaning the person who is not spiritually regenerated, he is not saved - is living only on a natural plane or a soulish plane) receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The Bible comes across on a spiritual level. It must be understood by faith. If you try to understand the Bible totally on an intellectual level, you are going to have some problems. Now that doesn't mean we don't use our heads, we must use the minds God gave us. But as a believer, you must approach the Word of God through faith, and that is the basis by which you can understand it.

The *third* basic premise in this study is that the Bible means what it says. Perhaps the most common mistake when people approach the Word of God is to read into it preconceived ideas, notions and traditions. When they read a passage, rather than really reading what it says, they read into it what they think it says, or what they heard someone tell them it means, rather than just putting aside traditions and reading the Bible for what it says.

Three Principles of Bible Study

In this first lesson, we are going to look at three principles of Bible study. Together these make up the key to the Bible. They are interrelated and as we progress, you will see how they relate to one another.

Right Division

Let us begin with the principle of right division. II Timothy 2:15 says, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth." Here we have right in Scripture, the divine key to understanding the Bible: rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

We are going to consider two things under this heading. *First* of all, what this does *not* mean and then what it *does* mean.

Rightly dividing the Word of Truth does *not* mean that we reject part of the Bible. Many times we have explained the principle of rightly dividing the Word of Truth and people respond by crossing their arms, getting a pious or antagonistic look on their face, and saying, "Well, I believe the whole Bible. I take it all. I don't divide any of it out. I want everything that God has for me."

What do they mean by that? Do they mean that they still offer animal sacrifices? That's part of the Bible, too, isn't it? Do they mean that they practice the Old Testament feast days, coming to Jerusalem three times a year to observe the

Holy Days? Is that what they mean when they say they take the whole Bible? Do they mean we should still keep the Sabbath like they did in the Bible? They weren't even supposed to go out of their house except to take care of their animals. They were supposed to stay home. Do they mean that? Well, surely not. You see, many people don't stop to think about what they are saying when they say, "I take the whole Bible." We say that, too. We take the whole Bible, too. We believe every jot and tittle of it, the whole book. It means just what it says. And that's all the more reason why we should rightly divide it.

We have a little phrase that helps understand the Bible, "All Scripture is for us, but not all Scripture is to us or about us." In other words, some parts of the Bible God addressed to someone else. He wrote it to the people of Israel. Some parts of the Bible He wrote specifically to us. This is what we mean when we rightly divide. But we don't reject any part of the Bible. Indeed, when we rightly divide, we come to appreciate and understand all of the Bible even better.

A second thing rightly dividing does *not* mean is picking and choosing. We must not go through the Bible and pick what we like and throw out what we don't like. Almost everyone makes distinctions in the Bible. There is not a person on the face of the earth who does everything that you find in the Bible. Indeed, you can't do everything you find in the Bible all at one time. For example, in one place the Bible says that you are to consider the ant because the ant looks ahead to winter, works hard in the summer, and stores ahead. And yet, another place in the Bible says that you should consider the birds because the birds don't sow and they don't reap and they don't gather into barns. Can you be doing both of those things at the same time? No, it would be impossible!

This is why we must rightly divide. We are not picking and choosing. The question is, where do we draw the line? We will find the answer as we continue in our study.

In past times, some Bibles had marginal headings that were very interesting. One Bible had headings in the Old Testament over the Laws of Israel where God says, "If you will keep my Law, I will bless you with this blessing and that blessing." And then a little while later in the passage it says, "If you don't keep my Law, I will curse you with this and this and this." This particular Bible had a marginal heading over the blessings which said, "Blessings on the Church." Those were supposedly all the blessings that we received. Then, when it got to the portion where it listed the curses, the heading read, "The Curses on Israel."

That's interesting, isn't it? Let's take all the blessings, but whenever there's a curse, let the Israelites have that. That's picking and choosing. That's not systematic, that's not rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

Some people study the Bible much like they window shop. Have you ever gone window shopping? You go downtown without enough money to buy things, so

you imagine what it would be like to have them. You say, "I like this appliance here" and "That's a nice piece of jewelry" and "I like this over here." "Those are the things I would like." Some people approach the Bible that way. They page through it and it says in one place that God will not allow you to have any diseases. Well, that sounds good, doesn't it? Let's take that one. And a little farther on there's something else that looks pretty good. Let's take that one, too. Have you ever been at those meetings where you claim promises and everybody pops up and says, “I’m going to claim this promise." Do you remember the song, "Every promise in the Book is mine"? The problem with it is, that it's not true. Every promise in the Book *isn't* mine. God promised me *some* things, but He didn't promise me every one of these promises. I'm perfectly satisfied with the ones He *did* promise me.

Let's be careful how we approach the Bible so that we're not rejecting part of it, and we're not picking and choosing arbitrarily. That's not what rightly dividing means.

So what does it mean? We want to point out two things. *First* of all, rightly dividing means that you read the address. The Bible is like mail that God has addressed to the people He wants to speak to at any given time. For example, take Romans 11:13. This is one of the most neglected verses in the Word of God. God has not left us to arbitrarily try to figure out what part of the Bible is specifically to us and which isn't. He has made it very clear if we would just read the address.

Romans is written by the Apostle Paul. He says, "For I speak to you Gentiles. In as much as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office." Or take Galatians 2:7. Again, God has not left it up to our individual whim. He has specifically and clearly told us who is writing to us, and who is writing to the Jews, to Israel. He does not leave it up to our own decision. In Galatians 2:7, we react, "But contrariwise, when they...." Who are "they"? He'll tell us a little later on in verse nine: James, Cephas (Peter), and John. He's talking about the Twelve Apostles and the believers in the Jerusalem church. "But contrariwise, when they saw that the Gospel of the Uncircumcision was committed unto me .... " Paul is writing that. The Gospel of the Uncircumcision, pertains to Gentiles, "as the Gospel of the Circumcision" (the Jews) "was committed unto Peter, for He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles." So again, God has very clearly, very simply laid out the addresses. When the Apostle Paul is writing or teaching, he is teaching the Gentiles. When Peter, James and John are writing and teaching, they are teaching the Jews.

Let's prove that. Look at James 1:1. Read the address. James is a wonderful book. We wouldn't want to do away with the Book of James at all. But we want to make sure we know who it was written to. "James, a servant of God and the Lord

Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." Who are the twelve tribes? Israel, the Jews. God specifically wrote that to them.

So, the *first* thing we do when we rightly divide is we read the address. We find out who God is writing to and make sure we understand whether He was writing to us or to someone else.

The *second* thing we do when we rightly divide is we test the things that differ. Philippians 1:10 says we should "approve things that are excellent." The word "approve" here is "to discern, or to test." The word translated "excellent" literally means to "carry things in two different directions." Therefore, it is talking about things that are different from each other. Philippians 1:10 literally tells us to test things that are different. When we rightly divide the Word we look in the Scriptures and we see whether something is different from something else. For example, take Romans 4:5. What's the most important thing we could come to understand out of the Word of God? It is how to be saved, how to be justified, or declared righteous before God. I can't think of anything more important than that, can you? "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

Now is there any way, shape or form that we could conclude from this verse that we are saved by works or that works have anything to do with our salvation? No. He specifically says that to him that worketh *not* but believeth on Him. Now look at James 2:24. Let's see if this is different. Let's test the things that differ. Paul says, "but to him that worketh *not* but believeth." What is belief? It is faith. His faith is counted for righteousness. What did James say? Writing to the twelve tribes (read the address), "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Is that different? Does it look different to you? Is God contradicting Himself? No. He's writing to a different group of people.

Let us notice another example: Matthew 28:19 - "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Notice who Jesus is talking to in verse sixteen - the Eleven Disciples. Of course there are only eleven because Judas had already hanged himself. We could say the Twelve Disciples because they were about to replace Judas - not with Paul - but with Matthias. To those men, Christ specifically said "Go and baptize." Did Christ send the Twelve Apostles to baptize? Yes, He did.

Now look at I Corinthians 1:17. Do you see a difference, Here it's the Apostle Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles speaking. "For Christ sent me *not* to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." Do you see a difference in those two statements? In one, the Twelve are sent to baptize. In the other one, Paul is not sent to baptize. Test the things that differ.

Dispensations

Now let's look at the *second* principle - the principle of Dispensations. *First* of all, what is a dispensation? The English word "dispensation" comes from a Greek word that is made up of two separate words. "Oikos" means "house" and "nomos" means "law." When you put them together you have "oikonomia" - the house law or the rule of the household. What is a dispensation? A dispensation is the rule of a household. In Scripture, God has had two different households, the house of Israel and what Paul calls "the household of faith," the house of God in this dispensation, the Body of Christ. Each one of these households has a set of rules, a house law. Do you have any rules or laws in your house? Surely you do. Every house has some rules, or it should. As your children grow up, they know that these are the rules of the house. Your rules might be different than my rules. Some of our rules might be the same. But it's important for all of our children to obey the rules of their own household, right? If my kids come home and say, "Over at so and so's house they get to do this." Do you know what I say? "That's fine, we'll let them do whatever they want to do at their house; but at our house we do it this way." That's the law of the household.

That's what a dispensation is. In our household, spiritually, God has given us a different set of rules than the household of Israel. Israel's set of rules is called The Law or the Law of Moses. Our household, our dispensation, is called Grace.

In Ephesians 3, we read, "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you *Gentiles* ...." There's the address. "If ye have heard of the Dispensation (the house law) of the Grace of God which is given me to you-ward. How that by revelation He made known unto me the Mystery." Our house law, or house rule is the Mystery; it is no longer the Law of Moses.

Notice the chart at the end of the chapter. The Scofield Bible made popular the dispensational scheme that most people follow, that is, the seven dispensations. You will notice that they are: **Innocence, Conscience, Human Government, Promise, Law, Grace and Kingdom**. Those are the seven basic distinctions that we see in Scripture. What we want to point out is that there is even a more simple and more general designation of economies that we can draw, but first let's identify the basic dispensations.

Innocence - This was the state that Adam and Eve were in before they sinned. From the time of Creation until the Fall of Man was a state of Innocence.

Conscience - This began, of course, with the Fall. Remember, Adam and Eve were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they ate, their consciences became aware of evil, therefore, we call it the Dispensation of Conscience. When we speak of the dispensations, we often think of each period ending and then another beginning. Actually, Conscience is still with us. Some people may not have much of one anymore, but it's still there. When we say

Conscience began at the Fall and goes until the Flood, we don't really mean that it ended at the Flood, we mean something else began there. Conscience continues even to this time.

The *third* dispensation is *Human Government.* Why do we call it Human Government? Because after the Flood when Noah landed at Mt. Ararat, God handed over to human beings the authority to make certain judgments and punishments. A notable example is murder. Before the time of the Flood, if someone committed murder, God dealt with that in His own way. There was not to be any human intervention. In fact, God specifically forbade, at that point, any human intervention. Do you remember when Cain killed Abel? Cain was afraid that if anyone saw him they would want to kill him. God specifically put a mark on him so people wouldn't kill him. But at the time of the Flood, God now gave to Noah and to the human race, the authority to put someone to death when they committed murder. As with conscience, human governments exist even until today. God has still entrusted to human beings the authority to make judgments, to punish, to even put to death, when people commit certain crimes. This began at the Flood.

The next major turning point is after the Tower of Babel. We call this the Dispensation of *Promise.* From Innocence to Human Government, God is dealing with Gentiles only. Why? Because there were no Jews until Abraham and his offspring come along.

Therefore, everyone was a Gentile at that time. But after the Gentiles rebelled against God at the Tower of Babel, He gave a promise to Abraham. He promised him many things, but one specific thing was that he would be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. This began, of course, with Abraham and in a sense the promise still continues, because through Christ even we participate in the spiritual blessings of salvation.

The *fifth* dispensation is Law. God gave the Law to Israel, through Moses, and this dispensation continued until the Apostle Paul was sent to the Gentiles.

Grace is the *sixth* dispensation. It runs from the ministry of the Apostle Paul to the Gentiles, until the Rapture, which, of course, is yet future.

Finally, we have the Dispensation of the *Kingdom,* from the Tribulation Period until the Great White Throne.

What is the relationship to Law throughout the dispensations? During the first four: Innocence, Conscience, Human Government and Promise, there was no Law. In Romans 5, we are specifically told that there was no Law at that time. This does not mean that God was not dealing with men, He was. He was dealing with them through their conscience and through human government, but there was no Law of Moses. In fact, there was no written revelation at that time.

Romans 5:12 - "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. For until the Law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses.... "

The second relationship to the Law is to be under the Law. Galatians 3:23 - "But before faith came, we were kept under the Law."

The *third* relationship is found in Romans 6:14 - "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the Law, but under Grace."

The *final* relationship to the Law is found in Jeremiah 31:32 - In the Kingdom, when the new covenant with Israel is mad effective in its fullness, God will write the Law within them They will go back to the Law as their house rule, or house, law, but it will be within them. That's the difference. In the Old Testament times, the Law was over them, they were under the Law. During the Kingdom, the Law will be within them.

Notice that God worked with Gentiles through the time of the Tower of Babel, then with Israel through the time of Promise and through the time of the Law. This includes the earthly ministry of Christ. Christ said, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." Now we read in Romans 11:13, Paul speaks to the Gentiles again. Do you see how God has moved back and forth in His dealing with men? First the Gentiles, then Israel, now the Gentiles again, and finally in the Kingdom, God will minister through the Israelites once again.

Progressive Revelation

The *third* principle we want to notice is Progressive Revelation. We are surely the most blessed generation of all people to live in this present age. We have the completed Word of God, the whole Bible. But sometimes we forget that the Bible was not all given at once. We sometimes have the idea that everybody had the Bible like we do. What we need to understand is that the Bible was progressively revealed - a little bit at a time. There is a great truth in that there are only three reasons that God ever gave new revelation at any time.

The *first* reason is to further explain a previous revelation. Let's consider an example of this: Do you remember when God first gave the Law of Moses at the beginning of the Wilderness wanderings? God called Moses up to the mountain, gave him the Law, Moses brought it back down, although the people had already broken it by that time. Then, thirty-nine or forty years later, God gave the Law again. Why? Because Israel had wandered about for forty years now and new situations had come up and the new generation needed to hear the Law anew. This is why we have the Book of Deuteronomy; it is the second giving of the Law. Here we find further explanation of things found in the original giving of the Law.

A *second* reason God gives a new revelation is to modify a previous revelation. We will see an example of this in a moment.

The *third* reason is to replace previous revelation, or to supersede it.

We want to center in on two kinds of progressive revelation. The *first* one is progression within the dispensation. Sometimes within a dispensation, God progresses and adds new things to the things that were already there. Galatians 3: 17 says, "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ...." What covenant is this? It is the Promise, the original covenant that God made with Abraham. Paul says, "And this I say, that the covenant, which was confirmed before of God in Christ, the Law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." In other words, Paul is saying, here's a progression. You've still got the basic promise, but to it God added the Law. Why? Verse 19 -"Wherefore then serveth the Law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made."

This is progression within a dispensation. God gave the original promise to Abraham and to his people, but four hundred and thirty years later He added something. He didn't do away with the promise, did He? No! That is what Paul is pointing out. He didn't do away with it, but he added some stipulations by which the people could participate in the original promise. Now they had some laws to keep.

Secondly, you have progression to a new dispensation. Sometimes a new revelation supersedes previous revelation. We could give several examples: God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, told the Twelve Apostles to go into all the world and teach all nations, baptizing them. The majority of Christians go back to that passage of Scripture for the "marching orders," their "commission." But what we need to understand is that sometimes new revelation supersede former revelation and replaces it. As we read in I Corinthians 1:17, Paul says, "For Christ sent me *not* to baptize but to preach the gospel." Here is a new revelation, superseding the old revelation. Does that mean we doubt whether that old revelation was true? No, it was true, we don't doubt that at all. It was true for that generation that he specifically spoke to, but God has superseded it with a new revelation.

There are no ordinances in this dispensation. According to the Book of Colossians, the Word of God says that in this present age, God has blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us (Col. 2:14). "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances." That statement supersedes or overshadows previous revelation, therefore, we don't have, ordinances any more. God also gave a new revelation concerning justification. It used to be that to be justified, you had to believe, and you also had to demonstrate your faith through works, but that has

been superseded now by a new revelation. Faith alone is now required for justification.

It used to be that God worked through miraculous signs to His people Israel. Indeed, the Scripture says, "the Jews require a sign." But God has superseded that revelation with a new revelation. Now He says we walk by faith, not by sight (II Cor. 5:7).

Bible study can be one of two things. It can be drudgery or it can be exciting and enjoyable. But it will only be meaningful as we follow the Scripture's instructions on how to do it: "Rightly dividing the Word of Truth." Understanding the dispensations, seeing the progressive revelation and recognizing that new revelations supersede old revelations will enable us to truly understand God's Word.

You will never understand the Word of God fully in its true sense, until you know the Lord, until you are saved. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." All of the things that we have seen in this lesson apply to believers. We challenge you today that if you have never trusted Christ, you need to do it. But understanding the Word of God is one of the least reasons you need to trust Christ. If you fail to trust Christ, there is the Lake of Fire, eternal Hell awaiting you. There is missing out on Heaven as well. These are more important reasons to trust Christ than just to be able to understand the Word of God.

So we challenge you today, if you have never come in simple faith believing the Gospel message that Christ died for your sins, was buried and rose again, then trust Him today. Then you'll be on the road to understanding God's plan for you.

NAME	FROM / TO	GOD'S DEALING WITH:	RELATION TO LAW:
1. Innocence	Creation to Fall	Gentiles (Gen. 10:5; Rom 2:14-15)	Without Law (Rom 2:12a; 5:13-14)
2. Conscience	Fall to Flood		
3. Human Government	Flood to Babel		
4. Promise	Abraham to Moses	Israel (Gen. 12:2-3; Matt. 10:5-6)	
5. Law	Moses to Paul		Under Law (Gal. 3:23)
6. Grace	Paul to Rapture	Gentiles (Rom. 11:13)	Under Grace (Rom. 6:14)
7. Kingdom	Tribulation To the Great White Throne	Israel (Rom. 11:26)	Law Within (Jer. 31:33)

Study Questions

1. Why have some people lost interest in the Bible?
2. What is *not* “right division”?
3. What *is* right division?
4. What is a dispensation?
5. Give an example of progression within a dispensation.
6. Give an example of progression to a new dispensation.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAIN DIVISIONS OF SCRIPTURE

"As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began...according to the revelation of the Mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Luke 1:70; Rom. 16:25b).

Of all the forces that hold the Church today in its iron grip, it seems that one of the strongest is the force and the grip of tradition. Many people hold the attitude, "If it was good enough for Grandma and Grandpa, I guess it's good enough for me." Of all the traditions that are held by various groups of Christians, perhaps the strongest and most confusing one of these is that traditional division of Scripture: the tradition that the Bible is divided up into simply Old Testament and New Testament.

We have often pointed out that everyone is a dispensationalist to some degree. If you do not offer animal sacrifices today at the temple in Jerusalem (which you will find is impossible to do at this moment), you are a dispensationalist, because you have recognized that those sacrifices are no longer binding on people in this present age; therefore, everyone is a dispensationalist. The only difference between dispensationalists is where they divide the Scripture, and draw the line as to what portion is to us and what portion is to the Jews. Perhaps one of the most common cliches that you will hear people refer to is the belief, the idea, that the Old Testament is for the Jews and the New Testament is for us.

We are going to show that the Old Testament and New Testament are not the main divisions of Scripture, and we're also going to point out that many people don't even know what the Old Testament and the New Testament really are, according to Scripture.

One of the most unfortunate features in most Bibles is the title page. I say this carefully, because as you know, I hold the Word of God in highest respect and reverence. Yet, we must understand that only the text is the portion that we refer to as the Word of God. The marginal notes, title pages, and paragraph headings were all added by man. In virtually every Bible today, when you turn to the Book of Genesis, what does the title page read? It probably says Old Testament. Likewise, in most Bibles, when you turn to the Gospel of Matthew, what does the title page read? It probably reads New Testament.

I say this is unfortunate because it has led to much false teaching on the subject of dispensations. We need to see that the most important division of Scripture is not Old Testament-New Testament, but rather, it is Prophecy and Mystery. If you understand nothing else, you will have gained by understanding this major division of Scripture.

J.C. O'Hair often referred to three faulty assumptions. The *first* one is this: The Old Testament begins in Genesis 1. If you know anything about simple logic, you know that if the assumption is wrong, then the conclusion is going to be wrong as well. So let's prove, first of all, that the Old Testament does not begin in Genesis 1. To do that, we need to know what the Old Testament is. We have to understand, first of all, that the word "testament" in Scripture is the same word as the word "covenant." In fact, in our English Bible we could actually interchange those two words, because in the original languages they are from the same word.

I personally believe that the word covenant is the preferred translation, because when we refer to the Old Testament, we are actually referring to the old covenant that God made with the people of Israel through Moses.

This is, in fact, the case as we read in II Corinthians 3:12-14, - "Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ." What is that Old Testament? Well, if you know what happened back then, you will know that Moses went up on the mount, met with God, and God gave him the covenant, the Ten Commandments, the Law. These all refer to and are the same as the Old Covenant or the Old Testament.

When did this take place? Did this take place in Genesis 1? We could read Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 and all the way to Chapter 50 and we wouldn't find one word of the Old Testament, the Old Covenant. We could read Exodus, all the way to Chapter 19, and we would not find the Old Covenant. It's not until Chapter 20 in the Book of Exodus that God reveals the Old Covenant. At that time it was new, but now it has become old because it has been superseded. But we do not find the Old Testament in the Book of Genesis.

Actually, it is helpful to understand that the period of time from the creation of man until giving of the Old Covenant, covers the time of approximately 2,500 years. When you consider the fact that the Old Covenant was only in effect for 1,500 years, that puts a different perspective on the Scriptures.

The *second* faulty assumption is that the New Testament begins in Matthew 1. It is in Matthew 27 where the New Testament actually begins. Matthew 26:27-28 - "And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it. For this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the

remission of sins." When does the New Testament or the New Covenant begin? It begins with the shedding of the blood of Christ.

Why is that important to understand? When was the blood of Christ shed? In Matthew 1? No, not until the end of the Four Gospel records. Therefore, the bulk of the material that we find in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all take place during Old Testament economy. That's why we find many statements in the Four Gospels, which as we look back, understanding grace, are quite incompatible with this dispensation.

Take, for example, the Sermon on the Mount. In a recent broadcast, one of the radio preachers was preaching on the Sermon on the Mount, and he was suggesting, of course, that the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 is actually the constitution of the Kingdom. I would agree, but what he meant by Kingdom was this dispensation. We need to understand that in the Gospel records, "Kingdom" is not referring to this dispensation; "Kingdom" refers to the Kingdom when the Lord will actually rule and reign on earth in the Millennium. So he was correct in his title but he didn't know what he was saying. He was suggesting that the Sermon on the Mount is the teaching for this present age. But as we look through a few of the statements, we see that this could not possibly be so.

Let's go back to Matthew 5 & 6 and examine some of the teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. We're not suggesting that there are no principles that we can benefit from the Sermon on the Mount. The entire Word of God contains principles that we can gain from, that we can come to understand and appreciate. But we have some specific statements that clearly identify this not as the instructions for this age, but God's instructions for His people Israel.

Matthew 5:5 - "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." What does this mean? Well, it means exactly what it says. It means that those to whom he is speaking are the people who will inherit the earth some day. God promised Abraham a land. God promised the people of Israel a perpetual title to a certain portion of real estate, and Christ is speaking to those people. "Blessed are those meek...they will inherit the earth." Are we going to inherit the earth? No, the Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20 that our citizenship is in Heaven! We have an entirely different hope than the people of Israel back at that time.

Another example shows the same hope being offered to these same people. Matthew 6:10 - "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven." God promised Israel a Kingdom on earth. It's called a Kingdom of Heaven only because it's a heavenly government, but it will take place on the earth.

A verse that clearly shows the difference between Law and Grace is Matthew 6:14 - "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also

forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive their trespasses." That passage of Scripture has troubled many people. In fact, that passage of Scripture has led many people to understand the Grace Message once they realized this was Law. If you forgive, you will be forgiven. If you do not forgive, you will not be forgiven. But that is not the basis of our forgiveness today. In Ephesians 4, we can compare what the Apostle Paul tells us. He tells us that forgiveness is on a different basis in this dispensation.

Ephesians 4:32 - "And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." You see, this is exactly the opposite from what Christ taught His followers in Matthew under the Kingdom program. He taught them that if they did not forgive, they would not be forgiven. But the Lord Jesus Christ taught us through the Apostle Paul, we are already forgiven! Now, forgive others. That's grace! That's the difference between Law and Grace.

What are we getting at? We're showing you that the bulk of the four Gospels contain Old Testament principles and look forward to the New Testament. Yet, we must understand that New Testament does not always mean Dispensation of Grace. How do we know this? As we rightly divide the Word of Troth, we must distinguish between the New Testament as God revealed it to the house of Israel and the house of Judah and the New Testament as it applies during the Dispensation of Grace.

Notice in Jeremiah 31:31 - "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant (again, remember that covenant and testament mean the same thing) with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah." Does it say anything about the Church, the Body of Christ? Not a word. It is the New Testament as it was originally given, and was applicable only to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Indeed, this is the New Testament that Christ is referring to in Matthew 26 - "This is the New Testament in My blood." What testament? Which covenant? The covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

This leads us to a *third* faulty assumption. Just as it is wrong to say that the Old Testament begins in Genesis 1, when it actually begins in Exodus 20, and that it is wrong to say that the New Testament begins in Matthew 1, when it begins at the end of the Four Gospels with the death of Christ, the third faulty assumption is that the Dispensation of Grace began with the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

This is one of the most important of the three. We need to understand why this is false. I am going to give you three good reasons why it is false. I have seen good writers who gave as many as twenty reasons why the Church of this dispensation could not have started on the day of Pentecost, but I will give you three that I believe summarize it very well.

The first reason: The day of Pentecost was a Jewish feast day. Notice in Acts 2:1, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come..." What does it mean when it says it was "fully come"? It simply means that day on the calendar had arrived. You see, the Jewish people throughout their history observed seven feasts throughout the year. Perhaps you are familiar with many of them. The Feast of Passover was instituted way back in Egypt when Israel came out of Egypt. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of First Fruits, etc., were all a certain day of the year and were to be observed every year without fail. When it says that the day of Pentecost was fully come, it simply meant that it was that time of the Jewish year. It was the fourth in a list of feast days and had nothing to do with Gentiles; it was entirely Jewish.

To show you that this is true, notice a few verses: Acts 2:5 - "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under Heaven." Then notice in Acts 2:9-10, "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers of Mesopotamia, and in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers in Rome, *Jews and proselytes."* Even though there were people who were Gentile in nationality, we are clearly told that they had become proselytes - Jewish proselytes. So why were they at Jerusalem? It was something every faithful Jew or proselyte did. They gathered at Jerusalem for the feast, and that is what the Feast of Pentecost was. Look at Verse 14 - "But Peter, standing up with the Eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem." And in Verse 22 - "Ye men of Israel." If you go on into Chapter 3, you find the same thing. Peter is talking to the Israelite people. No Gentiles are mentioned. In fact, you don't find any Gentiles in the Book of Acts until Chapter 10, after the conversion of Saul, later to become the Apostle Paul.

The Dispensation of Grace, on the other hand, involves a joint body - Jew and Gentile. But at Pentecost, you find only the Jewish people or those who are Jewish by religion.

The second reason that the day of Pentecost is not the beginning of this dispensation, is that you still have the Kingdom being offered to Israel after Pentecost. This dispensation could not have begun in Chapter 2 if God is still offering the Kingdom in Chapter 3. Notice in Acts 3:12, "And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, ye men of Israel," and in Verse 19, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." This is a reference to the Kingdom, the times of refreshing. Verse 20 **-** "He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you." This was actually the first real offer of the Kingdom.

Many teach that the Kingdom was offered while Christ was still on earth. Do you realize that the Kingdom was not really offered yet at that time? Indeed, if you

understand the Old Testament prophets, you will know that the Kingdom could not have been offered until the death of Christ. I Peter 1:11 - "[The prophets] searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." You cannot have the glory of the Kingdom until you have the suffering of Christ.

Many other Scriptures testify to this. In Matthew 16:5, before the Mount of Transfiguration, Christ had told the disciples, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, til they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom." Indeed, in Chapter 17, He takes that inner circle of three up to the Mount of Transfiguration and they see Christ transfigured into His Kingdom glory. Do you know what He says after that? "Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead." Why? Because the Kingdom was not to be offered until after the resurrection of Christ. We cannot have the Kingdom being offered and have the Body of Christ begun in Chapter 2 when the Kingdom is still being offered in Chapter 3.

Now a third reason: The Dispensation of Grace could not begin until Israel was cut off, until God had cut off His dealings with that nation. Traditional theology teaches that Israel was cut off at the cross when they crucified the Lord Jesus Christ, and then God began turning to the Gentiles. But what does the Scripture say? Luke 13:6 - "He spake also this parable: A certain man had a fig tree (the fig tree in Scripture represents Israel, their religious life as a people of God) planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none. (Who came seeking fruit for three years in Israel? The Lord Jesus Christ. He ministered for three years among those people seeking fruit but He didn't find any.) Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

Traditional theology would end at Verse 7 and say "Amen. Let them have it! That's it. Cut them off!" But notice what the Scripture says in Verse 8, "But He answering said unto them, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

As we read the Book of Acts, we find that God allowed one more year for Israel to repent. We now know they didn't. They even failed that extra year of testing. As we compare Scripture with Scripture, we find out that year was ended in Acts 7 with the stoning of Stephen. So God indeed allowed one extra year. But you see, Acts 2 takes place during that extra year, doesn't it? So God could not have begun the Dispensation of Grace while He was still allowing Israel a chance to repent.

If we reject these faulty assumptions, we have to come up with some creative alternatives based on Scripture, don't we? Let us now see three foundational

affirmations. These are three things that if you understand and come to appropriate them into your own understanding of Scripture, then you will know the difference between Prophecy and Mystery.

Point #1: The Dispensation of Grace was a mystery. This present age that we're living in called the Dispensation of Grace was a mystery. Ephesians 3 will help us understand what Paul means when he talks about the Mystery. First of all, I want to point out that the word "mystery" in the Bible means a secret. Some people read the word mystery and they think it means something hard to understand or too difficult, like a riddle. But that's not what the word mystery means as Paul uses it here. The word mystery, literally from the Greek means "to shut your mouth" or "to keep a secret." God knows how to keep a secret. Some of us don't, but He does. And when He keeps a secret, He doesn't let anyone know until the right time.

Ephesians 3:1 - "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the Dispensation of the Grace of God which is given me to you-ward." That statement in itself is very significant. "If ye have heard .... " Some Grace believers, a few years ago, were ministering to their family and told them about the dispensations. Their family members were faithful church members, maybe they were even saved, but they didn't know what the Dispensation of Grace was. They challenged this Grace believer and said, "What's this dispensation business that you're always talking about? I don't think it's even in the Bible." Well, that tells you how much they knew about their Bible. Right here it says, "If ye have heard of the Dispensation of the Grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation He made known to me the Mystery."

I want to point out three things in this text that identifies this giving of the Mystery. In Verse 5 we learn that it was not revealed in other ages. “Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." The Mystery is not found in Old Testament Scriptures, or to be even more precise, Old Testament Scripture or pre-Old Testament Scripture. You will not find the Mystery in Genesis; you won't find it all the way through the Old Testament; you won't find it in the Four Gospels. It was a secret. It was not revealed until the Apostle Paul.

Verse 8 tells us that it was "unsearchable." "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." That word literally means "untraceable." In other words, Paul is saying, "What I am preaching about here, this Mystery, cannot be traced back into the Old Testament." Why? Because it wasn't revealed there. It was a new revelation.

In Verse 9 he tells us that it was hid in God. "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the Mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in

God .... " Notice the care that Paul uses here when he chooses words. He doesn't say it was hid in Scripture, that it was tucked away in the Old Testament. He says it was hid in God: only God knew and He had not revealed it yet until the Apostle Paul.

I want to show you a contrast that is very basic to understanding the difference between Prophecy and Mystery. Turn to Acts 3 and Romans 16. Here are two passages you should be able to show someone to show the difference between Prophecy and Mystery. Acts 3:21, right after Peter offers the Kingdom to Israel and says Christ will even come back if you will repent "whom the Heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." There Peter is saying, "Here is a message; here is a truth that God has spoken by all the prophets." That's why we call it prophecy: part of the prophetic program. Do you know what's included in that? The death of Christ is in there, His resurrection, His return for Israel is included in that, the Kingdom and setting up of the Millennial reign of Christ is in there. It isn't known as the Millennium until we get to the Book of Revelation, but the Kingdom was revealed. That was all part of Prophecy. You will find all of that in Old Testament Scriptures.

But now contrast that with what Paul says about the Mystery in Romans 16:25 - "Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, (why does Paul call it his gospel? Because God gave it specifically to him) and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the Mystery, which was kept secret since the world began." Do you see the difference between Prophecy and Mystery? Prophecy in Acts 3 was spoken by all of the prophets since the world began. But the Apostle Paul says, "according to the revelation of the Mystery which was kept secret since the world began."

What does the Mystery include? The Mystery includes this present Dispensation of Grace. You won't find this dispensation revealed in the Old Testament. It's not there. The Mystery includes the fact that Jew and Gentile are brought together on equal ground, equal footing in Christ. That is the Mystery. You won't find that in Old Testament Scriptures.

The Rapture, the catching away of the Body of Christ at the end of this age, is not found in Old Testament Scriptures. You won't find it in the Four Gospels. That's because it was a part of the Mystery, kept secret since the world began.

Point # 2. The second affirmation that we want to make is that the Mystery was first revealed to Paul. Again in Ephesians 3, we have it stated that God committed it unto him. Compare that with I Timothy 1. In Ephesians Paul says, "If ye have heard of the Dispensation of the Grace of God which is given me to you-ward, how that by revelation He made known unto me the Mystery." In I Timothy 1:16, he says, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should

hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." According to this text, the Apostle Paul is the first one who was saved according to the current method of salvation.

Point # 3. The third point is that the instructions for the Body of Christ are found in Paul's Epistles. The instructions God wants us to obey in this dispensation are found in Paul's Epistles. How do we know? I'll give you two reasons.

Reason number one: No other writer in the Bible ever refers to the Body of Christ. You will never find that terminology anywhere but in Paul's Epistles. Why not? Because God gave him the responsibility of revealing the Mystery for this age. Peter, James, John, and all the other writers never mention the Body of Christ. Ephesians 5:32 calls the Church's union with Christ a great mystery.

Reason Number two: Paul claims to be the unique apostle and teacher of the Gentiles. II Timothy 1:11 - "Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles." How do we know that the Apostle Paul is a teacher of the Gentiles? He says so under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. How do we know that our instructions are found in this dispensation in Paul's Epistles? Paul said he was the teacher of the Gentiles. That's how we know.

A question that often comes up is, "What do we do with the other New Testament books?" Many people who have not been taught to rightly divide the Word of Truth have a preference and many people may prefer the Book of James or perhaps they like the Gospel of John or the Epistles of John. They find many things in there that are profitable and helpful.

Here's how we treat those books. Our first answer is that we treat them like we treat any other portion of Scripture, whether it's Old Testament or Genesis or whatever. We understand that there are many principles throughout the Word of God that are profitable. Paul is the one who said all Scripture is profitable. So we recognize the value of studying those things out. But as we do with the Old Testament, we recognize that non-Pauline Epistles like I & II Peter, I & II John, and Jude, have teachings in them which do not apply directly to us as members of the Body of Christ. In fact, there are many places where the teachings in these books apparently contradict the teaching that Paul gives us in this dispensation. The Word of God does not contradict, but when we rightly divide, it doesn't have to. We recognize that God wrote one thing for the people of Israel and He wrote another thing for us as members of the Body of Christ. So let's be careful with those books. Let's use them wisely. The Book of James has wonderful instruction on taming the tongue, and certainly we need to do that. The book of I Peter has a lot of material on suffering and how to handle that. So let's recognize who they were written to and that our instructions are found in Paul's writings.

I want to conclude with showing you perhaps the greatest distinction I find in Scripture between Prophecy and Mystery. That is in the area of salvation. I'm going to give you three more Scripture texts that will show you the great

difference between Prophecy and Mystery: the dealings that God had with His people, Israel, and the dealings God has with us through the Apostle Paul.

First of all, Matthew 19. Here are three references where someone asks, "What must I do to be saved? .... What must I do to inherit eternal life?" This is the most important question that you will ever ask, or that anyone would ever ask. What must I do to be saved? A very good question.

Listen to what the Lord answered when someone asked Him that question. Matthew 19:16 - "And behold, one came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And He said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." Here is how you enter into eternal life during this program - keep the commandments.

That was a requirement under the Kingdom program. Thank God, that's not the requirement under the Dispensation of the Grace of God.

There is a similar question in Acts 2:37-38, in which the Apostle Peter was asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter had just preached a powerful message telling the Israelites that they are in big trouble for crucifying Christ. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Repent and be baptized. Remember, that's still Prophecy. That's still within the one year when God is still offering the Kingdom to Israel. Repent and be baptized. But that's not the Mystery. That' s not the gospel for this dispensation.

The third reference, perhaps the most familiar to most of us is in Acts 16:30-31, where the Philippian jailor asked, "Sir what must I do to be saved?" What will the Apostle of the Gentiles tell him? Will he answer "keep the commandments"? Will he answer "Repent and be baptized"? N, Verse 31 - "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved, and thy house." Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe what? Believe that Christ died for you sins, was buried and rose again. That's the gospel. That is the most important distinction we will find in all of Scripture.

You see, today we are saved by grace through faith, not by works, lest any man should boast. What a glorious message we have to proclaim. Under Prophecy - Keep the commandments, repent and be baptized. Under Mystery - Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

Study Questions

1. What is the traditional approach to dividing the Scriptures?

2. What is truly the main division of Scripture?

3. Where does the “Old Testament” really begin?

4. Where does the “New Testament” really begin?

5. Is the “New Testament” the same as “the Dispensation of Grace”? Explain.

6. List some reasons the Dispensation of Grace did NOT begin on the day of Pentecost.

7. The Dispensation of Grace was a _____. Explain.

8. What contrast do we find between Acts 3:21 and Romans 16:25?

9. The Mystery was first revealed to _____. How do we know this?

10. Instructions for the Body of Christ are found in _____ _____. How do we know this?

11. How should we treat other books in the “New Testament”?

CHAPTER THREE

THE MYSTERY...Do We Rob Peter to Pay Paul?

> *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (I Corinthians 11:1).*

One of the most common accusations or complaints leveled at the Grace movement often centers around the belief that we make too much of the Apostle Paul. As we begin this chapter, we want to very carefully clarify that when we refer to the Apostle Paul, we are not doing so in worship or reverence. We are simply recognizing his place as the Apostle to the Gentiles. We worship the Lord Jesus Christ and we desire to exalt Him and lift Him up.

Yet it is very important that we come to understand the place that the Apostle Paul holds. You've heard the expression, "robbing Peter to pay Paul." Some would accuse us of doing just that. As Grace believers, we teach that the Church of this dispensation began with the ministry of the Apostle Paul and frankly, that's where the rub comes, because most of Christendom teaches that the Church of this age began through the instrumentality of the Apostle Peter. Whether it's Catholic or Protestant, most churches somewhere down the line believe that the Apostle Peter was the chosen instrument to bring in this dispensation. We dealt with that in Chapter Two as we pointed out that the Church in this dispensation did not begin on the day of Pentecost with the Apostle Peter; but it began rather with the ministry of Paul to the Gentiles.

To those who believe that the Church began with Peter, Paul is somewhat of a secondary figure. He's just a Johnny-come-lately figure in Scripture who sort of tags along behind and that any ministry he had was somewhat insignificant compared with Peter or some of the other Twelve Apostles.

We will find that if anyone is guilty of robbery, it is not we who emphasize the distinctive ministry of the Apostle Paul; rather, it's those who would give to Peter the distinction of having the information for this dispensation. I believe what is really happening is that people are robbing Paul to pay Peter. Many people are robbing from Paul his distinctive position in the Body of Christ, the Church of this age, and saying that Peter had that distinction. We're going to show today that if we rightly divide the Word of Truth, we don't have to rob anyone of anything. We can give Paul his due respect in this dispensation. We can give Peter his due respect in the dispensation in which he lived. We need to be very careful as we study Scripture not to mix these two programs together.

We'll be looking at two key passages and explaining the positions held by each of these two great leaders in God's program here among men. Before we look at this passage, we have to establish an important fact about the word "church." We'll be using this word from time to time in our study and we need to clarify the common misconception most people in Christian circles believe: that every time you read the word "church" in the Bible it means the same thing, or it is referring to the same group of people. What we need to understand is that this simply is not true. The Bible refers to several different churches. We want to briefly point those out to you. *First,* in Acts 7, we find a reference to a church, but it's not the Church, the Body of Christ, at all. It is different church. Acts 7:38 - "This is He, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us." There the word "church" referring to the people of Israel as they wandered about in the wilderness. Now that certainly was not the church in this dispensation. That was a different church. You see, the word "church" (ekklesia) simply means "called out," or “called-out group," or "a called-out assembly." Israel was called-out group. They were called out of Egypt, they were called out of the world to be a special people unto God. We, today, are a called-out, special group of people. We are called out of the world, not as a special nation as Israel was but we are called to be a part of the Body of Christ. So we too, are a church, but we are not Israel. Israel was a church but they weren’t the Body of Christ. We must keep these separate.

Acts 19 is another reference. This one is interesting because it is translated a bit differently. Here is another use for the word "ekklesia." Acts 19:32 - "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly (there's the word that is usually translated 'church,' the assembly, (the called-out group) was confused." What called-out group? It was an angry mob that wanted to do away with the Apostle Paul, yet they were a called-out group. They were an assembly. I've often stated that, unfortunately this verse is probably a better definition of most churches than any verse we can find. "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together." But, of course, this was not referring to a church in the sense that we think of a church. It was referring to a riotous mob of people.

In Colossians 1 we have another reference to a church. This is the Church, the Body of Christ. Colossians 1:24 - "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the Church." Ephesians says it just the opposite way. In Colossians it says the Body which is the Church. In Ephesians 1:22-23 it says, "gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body." So either way you say it, you have the same truth. The Church which is His Body, the Body which is His Church. That happens to be the Church in this present dispensation.

In Matthew 16, we find yet another reference to a church. But again we have to understand it is not the Church which is His body in Matthew. What church is it? Does it say anything here about the Church which is His body? Nothing of the sort. Instead, it tells us it is the Kingdom. Notice in verse 18, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." What church? Verse 19 - "And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven." We'll see in a few moments that Kingdom of Heaven has reference not to Heaven itself, but to the Kingdom that will be on earth: a heavenly kingdom, a heavenly government here on earth. So the church he is talking about here is the Kingdom Church. This will be the church that exists during the Millennial reign of Christ when Christ comes as King to reign over the people of Israel and over the people of the whole world. That will also be a church.

Let's begin by talking about Peter and the Kingdom Church. There is no denying that Peter has a very special place in this church. Consider the verses that precede this section of Scripture. Matthew 16:13 - "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He saith to them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven." In other words, Christ is saying you have come to understand something that cannot be understood on simply a human level. Flesh and blood have not helped you understand this truth. My Father which is in Heaven has helped you understand this truth. This, by the way, is how we understand any spiritual truth. The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God. They are foolishness unto him. We must have divine aid to understand God's truth. That's where the Word of God, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit comes in.

What does Christ mean then, first of all, when he "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church?" The standard interpretation, or at least the one I was brought up with, is the teaching that you have a play on words. In fact, the Scofield notes take this view. When he says Peter, literally he is saying, "Peter, you are a small stone." Greek word "Petros" means a small stone and when He "upon this rock," He uses the word "petra," meaning a large foundation stone. That view is, I believe, a reaction to the Catholic doctrine which teaches that Peter is the foundation of the church and that even today, the current Pope is simply a spiritual descendant of Peter.

It's interesting to point out that if you go by the standards that have been set today for the Pope, Peter could not have been a Pope. Today, a Pope can't have a wife, but Scripture tells us Peter was married.

I don’t believe we have to rely on simply a play on words to solve the problem. In fact, in his Greek commentary on the New Testament, MR. Vincent makes this comment about this word for rock: ″The word refers neither to Christ as a rock distinguished from Simon a stone, nor to Peter's confession, but to Peter himself, in the sense defined by his previous confession as the enlightened by the Father in Heaven. The reference to petra to Christ is forced and unnatural. The obvious reference of the word is to Peter." C.F. Baker comments in his commentary, ″It is all together possible that Christ spoke these words in Aramaic and not in Greek, and if so, there is no possibility of making the distinction between 'petros' a little stone and 'petra' a foundation stone in the Aramaic language."

In every dispensation God has given special authority to certain men. Surely, Moses and Aaron, David and Paul were men of special authority. Why take it away from Peter in the government of the Messianic Kingdom? What these scholars are saying is that you don't have to do any play on words at all. You simply take it for what it says, and in the Greek, the nearest antecedent to the statement that he makes is Peter and, therefore, he is simply saying, "You are Peter, you are a rock, you are a strong figure in this church. I am going to build my church on this strong foundation." There is nothing wrong with saying that because later on Paul says in Ephesians that we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. He is not referring there to Peter or the Twelve Apostles, but there is nothing wrong with seeing the apostles as part of the foundation.

I believe that Christ is saying, "I am going to build this church on Peter." What church is He talking about? He is talking about the Kingdom Church. How do we know that? I believe we can identify it by the next statement that He makes. Verse 18 continues, "and the gates of Hell shall prevail against it." The traditional interpretation of this is that the gates of Hell refer to the authority or forces of Satan or the forces of evil. But we want to point out that it cannot possibly mean that, for several reasons.

First of all, the word translated Hell is actually the Greek word "Hades." Hell and Hades are two different things. Hell in our normal terminology in the English language refers to the Lake of Fire, that final place of all unbelievers, eternal Hell fire. But Hades is merely a temporary place where Old Testament saints went upon death. Hades is "the place of the dead." In Old Testament times, both believers and unbelievers went to Hades. They both ended up in that place of the dead.

Second, what does He mean when He says, "the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." We have a similar statement back in Isaiah that will give some insight into what he is saying. Back on the farm we had a lot of gates, and part of my responsibility was to make sure that the gates were shut. The first question that my Dad asked me when I got back from working with the cows or the pigs was, "Did you shut the gate?" Why was that so important? Well, if I didn't shut the

gate, Dad said they could smell that it was open. They'll find out and they'll be there before you know what happened. And sure enough, the animals would be, and I would have to go round them up again. Where is the gate? It's the place where you pass in and out of an enclosure.

Hezekiah was one of the kings who was told he was going to die and then he asked for a reprieve and got it. But notice Isaiah 38:9-10 - "The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness: I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave." "Sheol" is the Hebrew word for Hades. So what you have is the same statement. I shall go to the gates of Hades. What were the gates of Hades? That's where you get in to Hades.

Now if that's where you get into Hades, I would assume that it is also where you get back out. I believe that is exactly what Christ is talking about when He says the gates of Hades will not prevail against the church. Why did He say that? Because when Christ sets up His Kingdom, not only will there be natural people who come into that kingdom who live through the Tribulation period, there will also be people: Old Testament saints, Kingdom saints, the Twelve Apostles who will be raised from the dead. And literally, the gates of Hades will open to release the occupants at that time and the Old Testament and Kingdom saints will leave Hades and enter into this Kingdom that Christ will set up. And the gates of Hades will not prevail against that Kingdom. In other words, they will not be able to hold them out. God will open those gates, and out they will come. This is what the gates of Hades refers to.

The *third* key or statement that we find in this text is in Matthew 16:19 - the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. What is the Kingdom of Heaven? It is that divine government which Christ will administer on earth during the Millennium, the 1,000-year reign of Christ. In Matthew 19:27-28, you will see that the Apostle Peter and all the apostles have an important place in this government. "Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The Kingdom of Heaven is that divine government. Peter will have a significant place in that government.

Christ says He is going to give him some keys. What are the keys He is talking about? I believe that is explained in the second half of Matthew 16:19 - "And I will give unto the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." What is it that Peter will be binding and what is it he will be loosing? Turn to Matthew 18:15. We will be coming to the word "church" (ekklesia) and we have to understand that we must stay in the context of the Book of Matthew. Many read into this passage the Church which is His Body.

But nowhere does it say that is the church in mind. The church that has already been revealed in Matthew is which church? The Kingdom Church. Keep that in mind as you read this passage. Matthew 18:15 - "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." During the Kingdom reign of Christ, the people of Israel and the people of the whole world will be put back under a legal system. The Old Testament Law will be put back into effect, but it will be administered in a little different way. It will be put on the hearts of the people of Israel rather than simply being over them. But it will still be the same Law.

According to the Law, if someone is accused of a crime, what did the Law of Moses require to convict him? Two or three witnesses. This is why Christ, as He talks about the Kingdom reign, brings up the very same thing. Matthew 18:17-19 - "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church." What church? The Kingdom Church. "But if he shall neglect to hear the church let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven."

This verse has been so misused and taken out of context. How many times have you heard, "Oh, if only two or three agree on something, God will do it for you." It's as though people take an exacto knife and cut verse 19 out and remove it from its surroundings. They take that one verse and it sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Let's get two or three to pray about this and we'll get it! Guaranteed! Is that what He's talking about in that context? No. He's talking about two or three judges in the Kingdom deciding the fate of someone who has transgressed. "If thy brother has transgressed." And what is He saying? "If two or three agree on earth as touching any thing." Touching what thing? Whether this person needs to be bound or whether he needs to be loosed. If two or three of you agree on that, it will be done.

In verse 20, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." I grew up in a small church, and on Wednesday night sometimes there would only be two or three people, and where would we go? We would go right to this verse. Where two or three are gathered, the Lord is there, so we don't have to worry that there is not a big crowd. Is that what that verse is talking about? No. It's talking about two or three witnesses who have gathered together to pass judgment on this man. And what does Christ say? "There am I in the midst of them." Why? Because He is the King at that time. He will personally attend this trial and He will be there to put His seal on the decision.

How far reaching are these decisions? What does this all involve? We're talking about some serious matters. This all has to do with the keys of the Kingdom that were given to the Apostle Peter. John 20:19-23 - "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." How much authority was the Apostle Peter and the other apostles given? They were given the authority to make a decision on the forgiveness of sins.

You will hear churches today, both Catholic and some Protestant, claim on the basis of this verse, that there are human beings: clergymen, and church leaders, who have the power to forgive or to cancel people's sins. A great system of theology has been built on this. It is a tragedy because if they would simply rightly divide the Word of Truth, they would know that this is not for this present dispensation.

In the early chapters of the Book of Acts, Peter exercised this leadership and many times we read Peter standing up with the Eleven. He had that power. Remember Ananias and Sapphira? Peter had the knowledge that they had sinned, and they were smitten dead. He had great authority!

Let's go on to Paul and the Grace Church, or we might say the Church which is His body, the Body of Christ. There's no denying it, Peter had great authority given to him. He had a great and important position in God's program. But it's equally clear in Scripture that Paul has been given a great position of authority in God's program. This position is described in I Corinthians 3.

First, notice the statement Paul makes about being the wise master builder. I Corinthians 3:9 - "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." In verse 10, Paul picks up on this idea of us being God's building and he explains where we are in God's program. "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder." Paul is going to illustrate what he means when he says we are God's building. He uses the word "master builder." In the Greek, the word is "architekton." You might recognize a similar English word, "architect." Paul is literally saying that according to the grace that God gave him - not the grace that we all get - he's talking about that special Dispensation of Grace, that special revelation of the mystery. We learn from this that the Apostle Paul is the holder of the blueprints of this dispensation. He is the architect. He has the plans. I'm not saying Paul drew the plans up. In fact, he very clearly points out that he got the plans from someone else, the Lord. I Corinthians 9:17 - "For if I do this thing willingly, I have

a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me." So Paul is saying he has the plans, the blueprints, because he is the architect. Where did he get the plans? God committed them to him. "A dispensation is committed unto me."

What position does he have? He has the position of having the blueprints. When we want to find something out we find it in Paul's Epistles for this dispensation. Then, as master builder, Paul directs the construction of the Church in this dispensation. Some examples of this: I Corinthians 4:16, "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me." I Corinthians 11:1 - "Be ye followers of me, even as I also of Christ." We are followers of Christ, but do we follow Christ the way Peter followed Christ? We had better not. We'd be in the wrong program, the wrong dispensation. We follow Christ the way Paul followed Christ, as the revelator of the new dispensation.

Also, in I Corinthians 14:37 - "If any man think himself be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." Again Paul reaffirms that he got his information from Christ. Philippians 3:17 -"Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have for an ensample." Also in Philippians 4:9 - "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." Is Paul being lifted up in pride? No, he's simply telling us that God revealed something special to him and it is worthy of our following.

What about the foundation of the Body Church? In the Kingdom Church we saw that Peter was a part of this foundation. In the Grace Church or the Church which is the Body of Christ, notice what Paul says in I Corinthians 3:10, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon." Many would point to verse 11 and say, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." How can Paul say he laid the foundation when Christ had already been preached way back before his time? Peter had been preaching about Christ. The difference is this - it's the WAY they preached Christ. Peter preached Christ according to Prophecy. Paul preached Christ according to the revelation of the Mystery (Romans 16:25). So it's not that they were preaching two different Christs, they were preaching two different phases of Christ's work. When Christ was on earth He was setting up Israel for a Kingdom. When Christ went back to Heaven, He revealed a new message for the Body of Christ preparing us for Heaven. Paul laid the foundation of Christ according to the revelation of the Mystery.

Let's examine Paul's authority for just a moment. Remember, under the Kingdom program Peter was given the authority to forgive sin and yet we find that the Apostle Paul was never given this authority. Why the difference? We find a significant statement in I Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." In this dispensation, we do not go

through any human mediator, there is no human priest for today, there is simply the Lord Jesus Christ - the one mediator. There is no human being on the face of the earth today who can forgive your sins, who has the authority to say you are forgiven. There is no individual who has that kind of power over you. Only the Lord Jesus Christ has that position in this dispensation.

However, that does not mean that the Apostle Paul has no authority at all in this dispensation. In fact, he has much authority. For example, if we want to find out God's marching orders and instructions for this dispensation, where do we go? Do we go to Peter and the Kingdom Church? We had better not; we must go to the Apostle Paul and the Body of Christ. When we want to find out how to administer church discipline and operation of the local church, do we go to the Apostle Peter? No. Today we go to the Apostle as the receiver of that great revelation of the mystery.

Are we robbing Peter of anything? No, we're not robbing him. In fact, we're giving him probably greater respect many people who don't understand these things. We, recognize that Peter had a great authority committed to him the power and the authority to forgive sins. Ultimately, God forgives sin, but He chose at that time to use human instruments to convey that forgiveness. So we're not robbing Peter. Paul is the one who has been robbed in this dispensation.

I want to close with an illustration that might help you understand what has happened. Let's use the imagination a moment and let's say that you happen to be a billionaire. You want to build a new house, so you find yourself a lot, hire a contractor, and hire some laborers. You give the specifications and say, "Go to it. I want you to build house." After a few weeks you come by and find the laborers sitting around and sipping sodas and leaning on shovels, and you say, "Wait a moment, it's not going to get done this way." So you hire some different laborers and go to work, but nothing seems to be getting done. You decide you're not getting anywhere this way, so you decide to move across town and build another house. Rather than just try to redo what they've started, you go out and choose another lot and another contractor and another set of workers. You build a second house. It's completed, you live your life, then retire and try to find some relatives of this original house and start that process and build it again.

That is what has happened. God built a house. He began building the house of Israel. He began building the program of the Kingdom. Yet the leaders of that Kingdom rejected it so He replaced them with the Twelve Apostles. Christ says, "I am going to take the Kingdom away from you and give it to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." He gave it to the apostles, they ministered and labored, but the people didn't respond. Consequently, many Christians teach that God let the Church take over the building of that house. But the truth is, God abandoned that house for awhile and built an entirely new house. That's the Dispensation of Grace and the Apostle Paul is the new contractor, the new architect. The Body of Christ are the new laborers. When God is completed with this house in this

dispensation, He will return and build again the house that He committed to the Israelites.

In the Bible we have two different houses, two different programs, two different leaders: the Apostle Peter and the Kingdom Church and the Apostle Paul and the Church which is His Body. Keep these straight and let's not rob either of their place in God's program.

Study Questions

1. Why are Grace believers sometimes accused of “robbing Peter to pay Paul”?

2. Identify several “churches” found in these passages:

   Acts 7:30 –
   Acts 19:32 –
   Col. 1:24 –
   Eph. 1:22, 23 –
   Matt. 16:18, 19 –

3. Explain “upon this rock” in Matthew 16:18.

4. What is meant by the statement, “the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it”?

5. Discuss the “keys of the Kingdom of Heaven” and “binding and loosing” (see also Matt. 18 and John 20.)

6. In what sense is Paul the “wise master builder” in this dispensation?

7. What foundation did Paul lay?

8. Describe Paul’s authority over the church in this dispensation.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHICH GOSPEL?
KINGDOM OR GRACE?

Let us pretend that we' re going on a trip today. You pick up a travel brochure down at the train station or the travel agency. You notice the location you want to visit, a beautiful spot, or perhaps a place of relaxation. You notice that it says the train is leaving on September 26th, so you make your plans. The brochure says you don't need to make reservations, just come to the train station. You come on that day and ask when the train is leaving, and the man at the counter says, "That train left yesterday." "But it's the 26th day today, isn't it"? "Yes, it's the 26th." "Well, look right here in the brochure. It says the train is leaving on the 26th." "Oh, I'm sorry, that was the brochure for a different year. This year it left on the 25th, so I'm afraid you've missed the train."

Let's think about our little story for a moment. You might have had full faith in what the brochure said. And the brochure might have been 100% accurate for the year it was printed. But do those things change the fact that you missed the train? No, they don't. The brochure may have had no mistakes at all. It may have been accurate for last year's trip. You may have believed fully that it meant exactly what it said. But because the brochure was not for this year's trip, you missed the train.

I believe there is a tragic parallel today with salvation. Today there are millions of people, you could even call them religious people, who have a great amount of faith. They even have faith in a message that is true, even Scriptural. And yet, if that message is not for today, I fear they may still miss the ride to Heaven.

Our study is about two gospels found in Scripture: the Gospel of the Kingdom and Gospel of the Grace of God. Both of these messages obviously are 100% accurate. They are part of the Word of God, the Scripture. They are true. Many people today have faith in one or more of these messages. Yet, if they do not have faith in the proper message for this dispensation, are they going on the trip?

A lot of religious people today believe something. Granted, many of them believe something that's not even found in the Bible. But many of them believe things that are in the Bible for another age. You might say, "God never changed. I thought the Bible said Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." That's right, He is. But while the character of God never changes, His methods of operation do. That is something we have to understand if we are going to understand Scripture. God's character never changes, He always will be the

same loving, gracious and merciful God that He has always been. But His methods of dispensing that grace and working and dealing with men have changed. We've already seen some of these changes. We have talked about the key to the Bible. We pointed out that in order to understand the Bible, you must obey what the Word of God says about itself. II Timothy 2:15 - "You must rightly divide the Word of Truth." You must distinguish between the differences that we find in Scripture from age to age, or from dispensation to dispensation.

We also pointed out that the dispensations have changed. We recognize several dispensations. Some divide it into seven. There are four basic changes: from Gentiles before the time of the Tower of Babel, to working among Jews from Abraham's time on; and then going back to Gentiles during this present dispensation under Paul's ministry, and finally, at the Rapture, God will again turn His attention to the Jews.

We also noticed the progressive revelation that we find in Scripture. God did not give the entire Word of God at one time for He revealed it progressively. What He revealed in former times is not necessarily the message He requires us to obey and believe at this present time. He has progressed in His revelation.

We have seen that the main division of Scripture is not Old Testament-New Testament; but, rather, the main division of Scripture is Prophecy and Mystery. Again, we must emphasize this. We must not confuse God's prophetic program that He spoke by the mouth of the holy prophets as the world began, with His Mystery program that was kept secret since the world began. We must keep these two separate.

We showed that Peter and Paul were two great leaders in God's plan but for two different dispensations. The Apostle Peter was, in the words of Christ, given the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven refers to our Lord's earthly reign. He was given that leadership.

The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, was given a ministry among the Body of Christ, the Apostle to the Gentiles. He laid the foundation according to I Corinthians 3. It says he was a wise master builder or an architect laying that foundation, preaching Christ - not according to His earthly ministry but Christ in His ascension: the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the Mystery.

We have contrasted two great messengers, now we're going to contrast two great messages: the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom and the message of the Gospel of the Grace of God.

First, we have to clarify our terminology. We pointed out that the word "church" does not always mean the same thing. Sometimes the word "church" is applied to Old Testament Israel - Acts 7, the church in the wilderness. Sometimes the

word "church" is applied to the future Kingdom Church, where the Lord spoke to Peter as we just referred to, and gave him the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. "I will build my church" and the gates of Hades will someday be opened up to release the Old Testament saints to enter that Kingdom. That will be a church.

But Paul is the only one who speaks of the Church which is His Body, or the Body of Christ. That is the Church which we presently are a part of in this dispensation. We're not talking about a local, visible manifestation of the local assembly; we're talking about the Church in general, the Body of Christ, all true believers in this dispensation.

Let's begin by pointing out that the word "gospel" like the word "church" also has different meanings in different parts of the Bible. God has not left it up to our own whim to decide what it means. Many times the word "gospel" has a qualifying phrase attached to it. For example, the two that we've already mentioned: the Gospel of the Kingdom. God very clearly pointed out that it's not just any gospel that He's referring to, it's the Gospel of the Kingdom. Then, the Apostle Paul in Acts 20, makes a reference to the Gospel of the Grace of God. We will find that they are two different things.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

Under this heading, we will consider two key requirements of the Gospel of the Kingdom. We will look at the ministry of John the Baptist, then we'll also see that the Lord Jesus Christ preached the same thing that John the Baptist was preaching: the Gospel of the Kingdom. Notice in Matthew 3:1, "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" The first major requirement of the Gospel of the Kingdom is repentance.

As we point out these two major requirements, let me preface it by saying that we're not suggesting that they didn't have to have faith. God has required faith in every dispensation. Granted, it has been faith in different things, but He's always required faith. So as we talk about these two requirements, understand that faith must permeate the whole thing.

But beyond that, we see that they had to have repentance. John preached it, Christ preached it. Matthew 4:17 - "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Why was repentance such a key aspect of the Gospel of the Kingdom? The answer is this: Israel was given a covenant. God made a covenant way back at the time of Abraham. He continued to reveal (progressive revelation again), adding certain things to that covenant, but never changing the basic promise of that covenant. As Israel progressed through the course of her history, she began to move away from the covenant. God had promised if they forsook the covenant, they would go into captivity, they would be dispersed, and certain things would happen to them. But if they turned

back to the covenant and kept the covenant, then God would restore them and He would again be their God and they would again be His people. But the requirement was that they had to turn back to the covenant.

What does it mean to turn back to something? To repent! That's what repentance is. Israel was going in the wrong direction. Israel was supposed to be going toward God, toward the covenant, but they had turned and had gone the other way. So at the time of Christ, their greatest need was to turn around, to change their minds. The Greek word for repentance means "a change of mind." Israel, going the wrong way, needed to hear one primary message - repent, turn around, go the other way, turn back to the covenant. That's why we find repentance stressed under the ministry of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

In all fairness, Paul does talk about repentance. We're not suggesting that there is no place for repentance in this dispensation. But what we find in Paul's ministry is that faith far overshadows the message of repentance. I believe that if we study it out theologically, we will find that in this dispensation, it is impossible for a person to repent until they have faith first.

But for Israel - Israel was already in a covenant relationship with God. They weren't walking according to the covenant. But that doesn't change the fact that they were in a covenant relationship; therefore, their greatest need was to repent.

The second requirement of the Gospel of the Kingdom is baptism. By that I mean, water baptism. Mark 1:4 - "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." There are those today who believe in practicing water baptism but many of them say, "But we don't preach baptism. We preach Christ and we just baptize along with it." John preached baptism. We must take the Scripture for what it says and we have to understand that John was already preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. Under the Kingdom Gospel, baptism with water or the washing with water, was required for remission of sins. Why? Because it was an act of faith. If you had faith, you obeyed the message, and the message in that dispensation was to be baptized. Therefore, John preached baptism. We need to point that out to our friends who say that they baptize but they don't preach baptism. John did preach baptism because it was essential for those people; it was necessary.

Mark 16:15 - "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." He doesn't tell us which gospel. But if we follow the rules of interpretation, we interpret a word in its context and in the context of the Four Gospels, which gospel do we find? We find the Gospel of the Kingdom. Nowhere have we had the Gospel of the Grace of God introduced yet. So when it says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," you have to go back and see what gospel they had been preaching. That was the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Mark 16:16 - "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Many unintentionally water this down by saying that in the last half of the verse it only says, "But he that believeth not shall be damned." It doesn't say, "He that isn't baptized will be damned." But what we need to point out is that the first part of the verse DOES say he who believes and is baptized will be saved. Under the Kingdom Gospel, baptism was required for salvation as a response of faith, or a manifestation of faith. Just because it doesn't say baptism in the second half of the verse doesn't make the first half of the verse false. It is still true. In that dispensation, he who believes and is baptized will be saved. The reason he doesn't have to say "baptized" in the second half of the verse is because if someone didn't believe in that dispensation, what chance would there be of their getting baptized? There would probably be no chance at all, so he doesn't have to say it. According to the Gospel of the Kingdom, baptism required.

We find that as the Apostle Peter preaches, still to Israel brings these two thoughts together and wraps them up in verse - baptism and repentance. Acts 2:36 - "Therefore all the house of Israel know assuredly." This isn't a mess to the Gentiles at this point; this is the message to Israel. Verse 38 - "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

So the two key requirements under the Kingdom Gospel repentance and baptism, all done, of course, in faith.

Now let's look at four unique features of the Gospel of Kingdom. The first one is physical healing. Matthew 4:23 - "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease am the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria; they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them." Also, you can compare Matthew 10 when Christ first sends out His Twelve Apostles. He tells them the same thing: they are to go healing. Matthew 10:5 – “These Twelve Jesus sent forth, commanded them, saying: Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans, enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And a go, preach, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out de freely ye have received, freely give.” Again, we see physical healing.

Why is this? God's people, Israel, were an earthly people. Part of the covenant under the Old Testament given through Moses promised physical health as long as they were walking in God's way. Deuteronomy 7:12-15 – “Wherefore, it shall come to pass, if ye harken to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which He sware unto thy fathers: and He will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: He will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine,

and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land of which He sware unto thy fathers to give thee. Thou shalt be blessed above all people; there shall not be a male or female barren among you, or among your cattle. And the Lord will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them that hate thee." Israel was promised, under the covenant, physical healing. This is why when Christ came, when John the Baptist came, and when the disciples were sent out, physical healing was a part of this message.

A second major feature in Matthew 5 is observance of the Law. Under the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Law of Moses was still to be observed. In Matthew 5: 17, Christ Himself said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." Again, if we compare another Scripture in Matthew 23:1, we find that Christ instructed His disciples to observe the Law. "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to His disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat." In other words, the scribes and Pharisees, even though they themselves were hypocrites, still occupied that spiritual position of sitting in Moses' seat. What was Moses' seat? It was that place of authority dispensing the Law. "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not." Even though the scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites, Christ recognized that the message they were giving, the Law, was still binding on His disciples. He told them to obey it, even though they were not to live the way the scribes and Pharisees lived.

The third prominent and unique feature is the repudiation of riches or giving up of material wealth. Here's a favorite portion of many people, but it's usually taken right out of its context and applied, supposedly, to today even though it's not the way God intended it to be taken originally. Matthew 6:25 is talking about taking no thought for what you will eat or drink or what you will put on. Don't try living that way today or you'll be mighty hungry! You're going to get mighty cold in the winter time when you don't have enough clothes to wear! "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what you shall drink." We have to take thought of what we will eat and drink. That doesn't mean we have to get all worried and upset, but we have to make provision, we have to plan ahead. Yet, Christ is telling them, "take no thought ... behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them." Later on He talks about Solomon in all his glory is not arrayed like one of these. Verse 33 - "But seek ye first the Kingdom of God." That's not talking about the Church, the Body of Christ. That's talking about the Kingdom when Christ will reign on earth. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." What things? What you will eat, and what you will wear. If you will simply seek the Kingdom as the Gospel of the Kingdom is being proclaimed, seek that and God will provide all those needs.

Indeed, in order to be a part of the Kingdom, God required them to give up their riches. Why? Because it was an act of faith. If God was going to give them everything they were going to need in the Kingdom, then why would they need all the things they had presently? They wouldn't. So God asked them to give them up. Let's look at a couple of places where it says that: Matthew 19 and Luke 12. In Matthew 19, the rich young ruler came and said, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Christ tells him that he should keep the commandments (there you see the observance of the Law once again). In verse 20, the young man said, "All these things I have kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" Jesus said to him, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven." (He's not saying he would go to Heaven; He's saying he would have treasure in Heaven.) The Kingdom will take place on earth. When Christ returns, He will bring back the treasure that was laid up in Heaven to give to the people who are living on the earth.

Heaven for the Jew was not a place to go, it was a place to store your treasures. He's saying, "Thou shalt have treasure in Heaven: and come and follow Me." The young man went away sorrowful because he had great riches. Some would teach that Christ only told this man to give up his riches because he was rich and He knew that would be a sore spot. But that can't be the reason, because over in Luke Christ tells the Apostles the same thing. Certainly all of them weren't rich, even though some of them might have been. Luke 12:31-33 - "But rather seek ye the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth." They are told to give everything up. You will recall that in the early days of the preaching among the Israelites alter the day of Pentecost, the believers did just that. "There was none that lacked," the Scripture says. Everyone who owned houses or land sold them and gave the price that they got at the Apostles' feet.

A fourth feature is that in the Gospel of the Kingdom, you were not required to understand the death of Christ. That almost sounds like heresy, doesn't it? Indeed, that would be heresy if we were saying that was the case in this dispensation. Because in this dispensation, the death of Christ is the central feature: His death, burial, and resurrection is the central feature of the gospel in this present age. But under the Gospel of the Kingdom, understanding the death of Christ was not required. Again, let me qualify that and clarify that. I'm not saying that the death of Christ was not efficacious because we now know, looking back, that the death of Christ is what provides salvation for men of all dispensations. But the point we're making is that they didn't know it yet at that time. Indeed, they didn't have to know that yet to be saved.

Luke 9:6 - "And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel.... "Again, it doesn't tell us which gospel. But we know that they were preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom at that time, "...and healing everywhere." Again, you see the connection of healing. What did that gospel include? Some would say they were probably telling people that Christ was going to die for their sins. Is that what they were telling? No! Look at Luke 18:31 - "Then He took unto Him the Twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on. And they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again." Now that sounds like the gospel we're familiar with, doesn't it? But look at Verse 34 - "And they understood none of these things." They understood none of these things! Why, they had been preaching the gospel, hadn't they? Yes, but which gospel? The Gospel of the Kingdom.

THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD

In Acts 20:24, Paul says that "unto him was committed this ministry of preaching the Gospel of the Grace of God." There is only one requirement under the Gospel of the Grace of God and that's faith.

What we're talking about is the Gospel of the Grace of God; we're not talking about the Gospel of the Kingdom anymore. We're not talking about the requirement of repentance and baptism anymore. That was part of the requirement of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Now we're talking about the Gospel of the Grace of God. Romans 4:4 - "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." I Corinthians 15:1-3 - "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel (which gospel? Paul already told us he preached the Gospel of the Grace of God) which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." He threw that in because some people in Corinth didn't believe in the resurrection. Paul tells them later on that if the resurrection isn't true, then our faith is vain or empty because the resurrection is part of the gospel. You've got to believe that in order to be saved. Verse 3 - "For I declared unto you first of all that which I also received; how that Christ died for our sins cording to the Scriptures." Christ's death, the blood Christ, is what pays for our sins. Is that all of the gospel? Verse 4 continues, "And that He was buried." The burial Christ represents the putting away of sin. His body bore sins and when Christ died, our sins were upon Him. Our sins went into the grave with Him and they were put out of sight. "He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." He was raised from the dead. That is the gospel in a nutshell: the death of Christ, the burial, the resurrection. No mention of repentance, or turning back to the covenant. No

mention of baptism. For you see, baptism in this dispensation is a requirement, but a result. Not water baptism, but Spirit baptism.

Once you believe the gospel, or upon believing the gospel the moment of faith, something happens to you, whether you realize it or not. Here's what happens: "For by one Spirit we all baptized into one Body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made drink into one Spirit" (I Cor. 12:13). We have all been baptized.

I sat with a young lady years ago, explaining the Gospel of Grace. When I got done and got to the part of Spirit baptism she looked up at me and said, "Are you saying that if I just believe, I'm already baptized?" I said, "You've got it! That's exactly what I'm saying." It's not something you have to go do yet. It's something the Spirit of God has already done in you, for in one Spirit are we all baptized.

The requirement - faith. The result - baptism with the He Spirit, baptizing you into the Body of Christ.

Now consider two unique features of the Gospel of Grace. We could have just taken the four features of the Gospel of the Kingdom and reversed them because we do see that there are some basic changes taking place. For example: physical healing is not part of the promise under the Gospel of the Grace of God; observance of the Law, obviously, is not a requirement; repudiation of riches is not required - although that doesn't mean we should search after and seek for that. But we don't have to give them up because we're not about to enter into the Kingdom as Christ was teaching His disciples. And we DO need to understand the death of Christ, whereas they didn't under the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Let us center in on two unique features: the first one is that we're not under the Law. In Acts 21, after Paul had been preaching for some time, goes back to Jerusalem and has a conversation with James, the Lord's half brother, who was at this time the leader of the Jerusalem church. Notice what it says in Acts 21:20 - "And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto Him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the Law." Why was this? These Jews that he's referring to were Kingdom believers, Kingdom saints, Jews who were saved under the Gospel of the Kingdom. What was one of the features of the Gospel of the Kingdom? Obedience to the Law. So they are continuing to do that. But notice in Verse 21 - "And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs." We have to understand that we are not under the Law. Romans 6:14 **-** "For ye are not under the Law, but under grace." However, that doesn't mean we should be lawless. I Corinthians 9:21 - "To them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law." Here Paul is saying, "I try to be all things to all men, at least to the extent that I scripturally

can." When Paul says, "I am as without law," that doesn't mean he was lawless. He says, literally, I am inlawed to Christ. I have a relationship with Him and I am not a lawless person.

The second unique feature of the Gospel of Grace is the fact that in this dispensation, works are to follow faith. Why do I say that's a unique feature? I say that because under the Gospel of the Kingdom, works were to accompany faith. In fact, in James, who writes to the twelve tribes, if you didn't have works along with your faith, you weren't saved. We want to show that a unique feature in this dispensation is that works are to follow faith, not required to accompany faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 - "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." We are to understand that in this dispensation, we are to have works. But they are to follow our faith. They are to come after we believe. It is a normal outworking of our faith in Christ.

When your train leaves, will you go along? Will you have the right ticket? Will you be trusting the Gospel of the Grace of God or will you be trusting the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom, or some other message?

The beauty of the gospel in this dispensation and in others, is that the ticket is free. God provides it. It's not something we have to earn. That's why we call it good news. But the only way you can get the ticket is by faith, and faith in the right thing. A lot of people today say, "Oh, I believe God. I believe there's a God. Why, I even believe He created the world. I believe that he loves me." But the Gospel of the Grace of God requires that you believe that Christ died for your sins, was buried, and rose again. Have you trusted that, and that alone for your salvation? That's the gospel for today.

Study Questions

1. Complete: "While God's _____ never changes, His _____ of _____ do."

2. What are two key requirements under the Kingdom Gospel?
   Matt. 3:1, 2; 4:17
   Mark 1:4; 16:16

3. List and explain four unique features of the Kingdom Gospel:
   Matt. 4:23, 24; 10:7,8
   Matt. 5:17; 23:23
   Matt. 6:31; 19:21; Luke 12:33
   Luke 9:6; 18:34

4. Give the requirement and result of the Gospel of Grace:
   Requirement – I Cor. 15:1-3
   Result – I Cor. 12:13

5. What are the two unique features of the Gospel of Grace?

   Acts 21:21; Rom 6:14
   Eph. 2:8-10

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EARTHLY HOPE & HEAVENLY HOPE

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

One of the most majestic, yet simple statements that we find in the entire Word of God is the one we find in the very first verse. I know that perhaps 99% of our readers could quote it, but let's look at Genesis 1 and allow these words to be blazed in our minds. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Many times we start reading our Bible and overlook the importance of this verse. Some have called this verse the key to the Bible. Previously, we showed that the key to the Bible is to tightly divide the Word of Truth, as we read in II Timothy 2:15.

But surely this verse goes right along with that principle. When we read that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," we need to rightly divide God's plan and program for Heaven and God's plan and program for the earth. As we do this, I trust we can come to understand better God's position that He has given us in this present age.

Why should we rightly divide when we come to Genesis 1:1? We have to understand that God's plan for Heaven and His plan for the earth are considerably different. There are many differences in the operation and the administration of God for these two areas, and in the people who make up the inhabitants of these two locations. We will be searching the Scriptures and finding out where we fit in.

We will consider the Earthly Hope and the Heavenly Hope. One of the first items we have to consider is, what does the Bible mean when it talks about our hope? If someone were to invite you over to their house and call you up a few days later and say, "Well, are you going to come this weekend like I asked?" and if you were to answer, "Well, I hope so," what would they probably think? They would most likely think that you're really not sure you're coming. But the Bible word for "hope" is a much stronger word. It does not contain the uncertainty that you find in the English word.

Many times when witnessing, I fear people have used the word "hope" in the wrong sense. I have asked on many occasions, "Are you going to Heaven? Do you know that you're going to be with the Lord when you die"? And many times I

get the answer, "I hope so." That's unfortunate because it suggests that the person really doesn't know if they're going to Heaven or not. This is why we need to understand what the word "hope" from Scripture really means.

Philippians 1 has a divine definition of the word "hope" as we find it in Scripture. Philippians 1:20 - "According to my earnest expectation and my hope." Here Paul associates hope with "earnest expectation." The most common form of this word in the New Testament is the noun form which is translated "hope," but the verb form is translated 18 times as "trust."

We want to briefly consider four general aspects of the word "hope." The first one is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is our hope. 1 Timothy 1:1 - "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior, and the Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope." Notice the words "which is" are in italics. They are not in the original. You could simply read it, "The Lord Jesus Christ our hope." He is our hope. You might ask why or in what sense is Christ our hope? It's very obvious when you consider our very sorry state as Gentiles apart from the promises. In Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul outlines our condition as Gentiles. We were strangers from the covenant and from the promises. We were without hope, we were without God in the world. We were hopeless people and yet, in Christ, we have hope. One sense that Christ is our hope is in giving us salvation. We have hope in Christ because He is the one who provides a way for us to be saved.

But we could say that Christ is our hope in another sense. He gives us hope to continue on in life under difficult circumstances. In a very real way, our faith in Christ gives us hope for this life. Some time ago, I read of a young preacher who was standing before the ordination council in a rather large building that could hold 1,000 people, but the only ones present were the ordaining council, just a few men listening to him. He preached his heart out and at the end of the service the council rendered their judgment. They recommended to this young man that he give up preaching, because he would never make a preacher. They suggested that he try something else. This young man's name was G. Campbell Morgan. He went on to become, perhaps, one of the most popular preachers in both England and in the United States of America. He was a powerful preacher. He made a statement in one of his sermons which tells us a little bit about the hope he had in order to continue on in serving the Lord. He said, "When you start to follow Christ, burn your bridges. Don't give yourself a chance to go back." He understood that once you get into the ministry of Christ and serving Him, you stick with it. Christ gives you the hope to go on. He is our hope.

A second kind of hope is found in Acts 23 and that is the hope of resurrection. This is an interesting situation. The Apostle Paul has found himself in front of the council. The council was otherwise known as the Sanhedrin, a group of men sitting in judgment of Paul. Paul notices that there are two groups within this council. In Acts 23:6 we have these two groups defined or outlined for us. "But

when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." He knew what that would result in. In verse 8 we are told, "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection." I know it's an old joke, but I’ll say it anyway - that's why they're sad you see? They did not believe in the resurrection. That will help you remember and distinguish between the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

However, the Pharisees confess both. Paul looked at the group and he knew that if he said something about the resurrection, then he'd at least get half of them on his side. So he proclaimed boldly, "I am standing here because of the hope of the resurrection." And, of course, it caused division and dissension between the group. It did get Paul off the hook at that moment.

The resurrection is a hope. Why is it a hope? *First* of all, it abolishes the fear of death. If you believe that you are going to be raised again someday, death does not hold the terror for you that it otherwise would, so it is a great hope in that respect. But *secondly,* it offers life beyond the grave. You do not have to fear death to begin with and you also know that you'll live again beyond the grave.

I would like to tell you a quote concerning two different men: one who did not understand the hope of the resurrection and one who did. Four-hundred years before the birth of Christ, Socrates, the renowned Greek philosopher, drank poison hemlock and lay down to die. "Shall we live again?" his friends asked. The dying philosopher could only reply, "I hope so." Apparently he was using it in the loose sense of the term, "I hope so, but no man can know." What a hopeless situation.

But contrast Sir Walter Raleigh. After Sir Walter Raleigh was beheaded in the tower of London, they found in his Bible these true and striking lines written the night before his death. "Even such as time that takes in trust our youth, our joys and all we have and pays us but with age and dust who in the dark and silent grave, when we have wandered all our ways, shuts up the story of our days. But from this earth, this grave, this dust, my God shall raise me up, I trust." What a difference! The one who said, "We really don't know if there is a life after the grave" and the other who said, "My God shall raise me up, I trust." This is the hope of resurrection.

The *third* hope is the hope of eternal life. Titus 1:2 - "In hope of eternal life which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." There is a sense in that we already have eternal life. When we are saved, we get the life of Christ. We get the very righteousness of Christ imputed to us. So in that sense, we already have eternal life. But there is a sense in which eternal life is held out before us as a future hope. That's why it says "In hope of eternal life." In this sense, we are looking forward to the fact that we will never die again. The hope of the

resurrection assures us that we will live again. The hope of eternal life assures us that we won't die again.

A fourth kind of hope that we find in Scripture is really the one which we are centering in on as we talk about our hope. That is found in Colossians 1 - the hope of our eternal vocation, our eternal calling. In verse 3, Paul writes, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you. Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which ye have for all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in Heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." Those of us who live in the Dispensation of the Grace of God have a heavenly hope. We have the hope of someday going to live with the Lord in Heaven.

When I was growing up I had a lot of confusion about this whole matter. I remember in my earliest days being told that if I trusted Christ I would go to Heaven when I died and that I would live with the Lord in Heaven forever. Then I remember going off to Bible Institute (which was not a Grace institute, but rather it was an Acts 2 type institute) and being told we might get to Heaven for a little while but we're coming right back to the earth to live on the earth forever. Then I got in the Grace Movement and some people told me I was going back to Heaven again, which I was glad to hear because that's really where I'd like to be. I heard even further that "no, you'll be back on the earth." So, there is quite a bit of confusion. Are we going to be in Heaven or on earth? Let's go to the Scriptures and see both the heavenly and the earthly hope.

Let's start with Job. We'll cover Job first because the material covered in the Book of Job is among the very earliest that we find in the Scriptures. It is evidently before the time of the Law, because there is no reference at this point yet to the Law. We point this out because actually Job appears closer to the center of your Bible. We need to understand that the contents that it covers takes place very early in history. Job 19:23-26 - "Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book!" God graciously granted him that desire. Then he says, "that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever." We actually have something better than that. He thought that being engraved in a rock would be eternal. Actually he got it placed in the Word of God, which is more eternal than being placed in a rock. Verse 25 - "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; And though after my skin worms destroy this body" (that is a bit awkward - he is actually talking about after his skin is decayed) "yet in my flesh shall I see God." The question is - where will he see God? Where is God going to be? Where did the last verse just tell us? My Redeemer liveth and He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. So if we stay within this context, Job has the confidence that when he is resurrected, he will see the Lord on the earth. We would say he had an earthly hope.

That took place before the Law - but what about during the Law? Psalm 37 identifies the hope of the Israelites. Israel was God's earthly people, God's covenant people. In verse 9 - "For evil doers shall be cut off, but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth." In verse 11 - "But the meek shall inherit the earth," (which, by the way, is exactly what Christ taught in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount). "And delight themselves in the abundance of peace." This refers to the Kingdom when there will be an abundance of peace on the earth. Why? Because Christ will be ruling with a rod of iron. He will not allow sin to become manifested in outward ways. And then also, verse 22 - "For such as be blessed of Him shall inherit the earth." Verse 29 - "The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever." So this kingdom on the earth goes on, even though the Millennium comes to an end after a thousand years. It will be changed to a new earth, but it will be the earth.

Verse 34 – “Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee to inherit the land." This is all in accordance with the covenant. Let's go to Jeremiah 7. We have to understand the reason or at least one of the reasons Israel is promised that they will inherit the earth: because it is simply part of the covenant God made back with Abraham. God promised Abraham several things. One of them was that he would inherit a portion of land. Jeremiah 7:6 - "If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers." Who are the fathers? Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. How long are they going to dwell there? "Forever and ever." They have an earthly hope.

For another cross reference, look at Isaiah 60:20-21. Notice the context, the eternal kingdom - "Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself, for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, And the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous; They shall inherit the land forever." So time and time again, we find that promise. As we have mentioned, Matthew 5:5 says the same thing: "The meek shall inherit the earth."

A question that often comes up when we talk about this is, "Did the Old Testament saints ever go to Heaven?" I believe the answer to that is no. They did not go to Heaven. Some would point to a couple of obscure locations in Scripture to prove that they did. The Scripture says that Enoch "was not for the Lord took him." You'll notice it doesn't say *where* He took him, does it? Some think that the Lord took him to Heaven. I don't happen to think so. Some believe that when Elijah was caught off the earth with the fiery chariot, that he was taken into Heaven. Remember, the word "Heaven" is plural - "Heavens." You find at least three heavens in Scripture. *First,* you have the atmosphere, which is where the birds live. When God created during those six days, He spoke of the birds in the heavens. But He's not talking about birds in the throne room of God. He's talking about the birds in the atmosphere, in the air. He also talks about the stars of

heaven. That's the *second* layer, or the interstellar space, beyond the atmosphere. But it's still not the throne room of God.

The Scripture also tells us about the Heaven of heavens. That's the throne room of God. So when it says Elijah was taken up off into Heaven, that most likely is from the point of view of Elisha who simply saw him go off into the air. He did go off at least into the atmosphere, we know that much. Did Enoch go to Heaven? Did Elijah go to Heaven? In John 3:13, we read, "And no man hath ascended up to Heaven, but He that came down from Heaven, even the Son of Man which is in Heaven." If Christ meant what He said, they must not have gone to the Heaven He has in mind, because He said no man has ascended into Heaven.

There are those who teach that after the death of Christ, He took the Old Testament saints to Heaven. The Old Testament saints we know went to Sheol or Hades - that's the Hebrew and Greek word for the place of the dead, the place of the unseen. But did Christ take them to Heaven? Again, let's look at Scripture. Acts 2:34 - "For David is not ascended into the heavens, but he saith himself, the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand." Did the Old Testament saints go into Heaven? It appears not. They had an earthly hope.

Matthew 16 says that the gates of Hades will not prevail against the Kingdom Church. I believe that means the gates of Hades where the Old Testament saints went when they died, and where the Kingdom saints went, that the Gates of Hades will not prevail against that Kingdom Church. Why? Because they will be opened to release them to enter into the Kingdom. So the teaching of Christ in Matthew 16 is that when the Kingdom is set up, some of those who will populate it will be the Old Testament saints who are presently in Hades. The gates of Hades will not prevail against that. If that statement is going to be true then, they have to still be there now.

Now let us consider the heavenly hope. There are three key Scriptures we want to examine and the first one is Philippians 3:20 - "For our conversation (our citizenship) is in Heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior." There is an interesting cross reference in Acts 22:28 for the same word. Paul is about to be scourged and he's thinking hard about how to get out of this one.

Verse 25 says, "And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" Well, of course, he knew that the centurion knew the answer and that it was not lawful. "When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest, for this man is a Roman." He's shaking in his boots. According to some sources, if you did unlawfully punish someone, you actually had to bear their punishment if you were caught.

Verse 27 - "Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman?" Notice his answer, "He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered,

With a great sum obtained I this freedom." This word "freedom" is translated from the same root word as "conversation" in Philippians. So he's saying "with a great sum obtained I this citizenship to be a citizen of Rome." In that day, you either had to be born into it or you had to somehow purchase it. When Paul says our conversation is in Heaven, he's literally saying that our citizenship, our political tie, is to Heaven.

Later we will see that we are "ambassadors for Christ." What is an ambassador? It's someone who represents one country to another location. If we are ambassadors for Christ on the earth, that means that we're not citizens here. We've just shown you we're citizens of Heaven. But what happens when the ambassador's work is done? It's time to go home, he goes back to his homeland. What's going to happen to us when our work here is done? We're going to go back to our homeland. Notice in II Corinthians 5:1 - "For we know that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle (our earthly tent house, our body is just temporary, a tent) were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." What a contrast he's drawing! We have this tent while we are here on earth, temporarily, but we have a permanent place in Heaven. Again, we point to Heaven as our dwelling place.

But what about now? What's our relationship to Heaven now? Ephesians 1 and 2 show our Lord's position at this present time. Ephesians 1: 17 - "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places." We learn here that Christ presently is seated in the heavenly places.

In Ephesians 2:6 - "And hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Our position today in Christ is based on His position. Where is Christ? He's seated in the heavenlies. Where are we positionally? We're seated in the heavenlies. Someday we will be experientially seated in the heavenlies. We don't experience that now. All we experience now is sitting here on earth. We've never experienced sitting in Heaven. But we do have that position. Someday God will come and catch away the Body of Christ. The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout and He will catch away those who are alive and remain. And, of course, those who have died in this dispensation will also be brought out of their graves and we will be caught away to meet the Lord in the air and we will be forever with the Lord.

This is the hope of the Body of Christ. Believers in other ages had an earthly hope. We have a heavenly hope. These are different locations. In the Book of Revelation in Chapter 20, we find a *third* location where I guarantee you don't

want to go. We've been talking about believers, about the Old Testament saints who will live on the earth, the new earth. Those living in this dispensation will live in Heaven. And again, I believe it will be a new Heaven. But notice in Revelation 20:15, which is talking about unbelievers - "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the Lake of Fire."

You see, there are three eternal locations. There is Heaven for those of us living in this dispensation who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is the new earth for those who lived outside of this dispensation and believed. But there's a Lake of Fire for the unsaved who never trusted in God's program. What a sad condition they will be in for all eternity. We get to live in Heaven for all eternity. Some people get to live on the earth for all eternity, but that's not to say they won't enjoy that. We sometimes gloat as believers in this dispensation because we get to go to Heaven. Yet, the new earth is not going to be a bad place to live. It's going to be paradise. It's going to be a glorious, grand place to live. But for those who are unsaved, it is the Lake of Fire for eternity. We urge you today that if you have never trusted Christ and you don't know if you're going to go to Heaven to be with the Lord when you die or when the Lord returns, then you need to trust Him today.

Do you have that hope? Paul calls the Rapture a blessed hope! Why? Because it is something we're looking forward to. It's exciting. And yet many people today are afraid of the Rapture. In fact, they probably wish it wouldn't come. They wish it would be delayed. As a youngster, I listened to messages on the return of Christ. I remember being very frightened of that thought. And yet I remember coming to a point in my life when I fully trusted in Christ's finished work for me and an amazing thing happened. No longer was the return of Christ something to be feared. It was something to look forward to - something exciting and something that I wanted very deeply. So if you don't have that hope of going to Heaven, you can have that hope right now by simply trusting Christ, simply believing that when He died, He died for your sins. He was buried and rose again. He did that all on your behalf. You can have salvation by trusting in that message.

Study Questions

1. What does the Bible word for “hope” mean?

2. What are four general aspects of hope?

   I Tim. 1:1 –
   Acts 23:6 –
   Titus 1:2; 3:7 –
   Col. 1:5 –

3. What was Job’s expectation? (Job 19:25, 26)

4. What did God promise Israel? (Psalm 37, Matt. 5:5)

5. Did Old Testament saints go to Heaven? (John 3:13; Acts 2:34)

6. What truth does Paul teach in Philippians 3:20?

7. What do we learn from II Corinthians 5:1?

8. What is our relationship to Heaven at this present time? (Eph. 1:18-20;2:4-6)

CHAPTER SIX

THE HEART OF THE MYSTERY... The Countdown

> *"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Romans 11:25).*

In one of his books, C.R. Stam relates a conversation with a non-grace pastor and during the course of the conversation, they were discussing Ephesians 3:9 where the Apostle Paul says, "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the Mystery." This other minister listened to that and said, "Fellowship of the mystery, fellowship of the mystery. That's kind of catchy. I think I'll preach on that sometime." Well, this fellow didn't even know what it meant, much less explain to others what the Apostle was talking about. He liked the sound of the expression but didn't know what the Mystery was.

We've been laying a foundation for understanding the Mystery. First, we began by pointing out that the key to the Bible, according to the Apostle Paul, is rightly dividing the Word of Truth. You must distinguish between God's plan and program for the nation of Israel and God's plan and program for the Church which is the Body of Christ. We pointed out that God has worked in different ways at different times. We call those dispensations or different economies. From time to time, God has requested and required different things of mankind. We want to be careful to understand just what He requires of us rather than obeying what He required of someone else. Therefore, we must rightly divide the Word of Truth.

We also pointed out that the main division of Scripture is not the traditional division of Old Testament and New Testament. But the main division of Scripture is that division between Prophecy and Mystery. That which God predicted through all the prophets, the prophetic program for Israel, is one thing. But the Mystery or the secret, which is in progress right now, is another thing. We distinguished between Peter's ministry as an apostle of the circumcision, as Paul calls him, and Paul's ministry as the apostle of the Gentiles, or the apostle of the uncircumcision. We distinguished between the Gospel of the Kingdom, which has to do with the Millennial Kingdom, the reign of Christ on earth, and the Gospel of the Grace of God, which is in effect during this dispensation. We also looked at the two programs, the heavenly program, the Body of Christ, and the earthly program for the people of Israel.

With that foundation, we want to answer the question, "What is the Mystery?" We've been talking about the Mystery and yet some people aren't really quite sure what it is. We don't want to be like the preacher who was looking for a catchy phrase. We want to really understand what Scripture says and teaches about the Mystery.

In a moment we're going to list five key aspects of the Mystery that we find in Paul's Epistles. But before we do that, we want to explain what the word "mystery" really means as we find it in Scripture. The word was used in the days of the Bible in two different ways. *First* of all, the word "mystery" can mean something hidden or a secret. That's the most literal meaning of the word. The Greek word means "to shut the mouth." So it is a secret that someone is keeping.

The *second* use of the word "mystery" in the culture in which Paul lived, was a secret only revealed to the initiated. It was a word sometimes used among the cults of that day, the fraternities. If you joined the club, they would let you in on the secret. I believe there is a sense in which Paul uses the word in that way. Of course, the club in this case is the club of believers. There are certain things that according to Scripture, you can only understand to its fullness if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We will be pointing out that there were several things that were secret all the way through the Old Testament period. Indeed, they were still secret during the period when Christ walked on this earth during the Four Gospels period, and that they were first revealed through the ministry of the Apostle Paul. But first, I just want to quickly enumerate five key aspects of the Mystery that we find in Paul's Epistles.

The *first* one is found in Romans 11:25 - "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this Mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." The secret that Paul is talking about here is that God would do a Gentile work during a period of Israel's blindness. Why is that a secret? Because nowhere in the Old Testament do you find an indication that God would do a Gentile work entirely apart from Israel. The Old Testament said that Gentiles could be saved because they could always come in through Israel's program. The Old Testament always predicted that. But never, before the Mystery was revealed, do you read of a separate Gentile work apart from Israel.

The *second* part of the Mystery is the Rapture, or the catching away, if you prefer. The "translation" some have called it, when the Body of Christ simply disappears from this earth and is caught up to be with the Lord according to I Thessalonians 4. I Corinthians 15:51 - "Behold, I show you a mystery." It's a secret because nowhere in the Old Testament do you read of the Rapture. Nowhere do you find God telling that He would catch away a group of people into

the air and take them to Heaven. That's simply not a part of Old Testament prophecy. It was a secret.

The *third* part of the Mystery is Ephesians 3:3-6. This is that God would join Jew and Gentile together in one body. "How that by revelation He made known unto me the Mystery." Then in verse 6, he tells us the Mystery is "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel." Notice carefully, he doesn't say that the secret or the Mystery is that Gentiles can be saved. As we just pointed out, that was revealed all the way through the Old Testament. They could always be saved coming in through Israel. But the Mystery is that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs and of the same body. Under Israel's program, the Gentiles were always sort of secondary citizens. They never reached the full standing along with the Jews. Only in this dispensation do you find that taking place. That's why it was called a mystery, a secret.

A *fourth* aspect of the Mystery is our union with Christ, our vital union with Christ in one body. We find that in Ephesians 5:31-32 - "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." Never before this dispensation has the believer been given a position of union with the Lord. In Old Testament times, under God's program for Israel, it was always a king - subject relationship. Christ was king over Israel. Never before did you have the close union that we have now: Christ, as the head, and we, the body: a vital, joint union. This was also a secret.

A *fifth* aspect is the one we want to consider now, and that is: the full meaning of the Cross. We're calling this the heart of the Mystery, because this is the most important part of the Mystery. I Corinthians 2:7 - "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Christ referred to Satan as the prince of this world. Paul refers to him as "the god of this age" and "the prince of the power of the air." Satan and his forces are the princes of this world. What this Scripture tells us is that if they had known what the Cross would accomplish, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory.

Why? Because they would have known that it would have spelled their destruction and their end. Satan can read the Bible just as well as you and I can. In fact, he can read it a lot better than a lot of us. Satan poured over those Old Testament Scriptures - you can count on it - as God's program and plan was revealed to see how he could counteract it. I'm sure that Satan and the demons searched and searched. Well, what's going to happen? What's coming up? If there was any inkling that the Cross would spell his defeat, he would have tried to avoid that taking place. But this Scripture informs us that the princes of this world did not know what the Cross would accomplish and that's why they went

ahead and crucified Him. Satan thought he was winning a victory when Christ was crucified. That's because God had kept it a secret.

In I Corinthians 1:18, Paul uses a very crucial expression -"For the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God." The expression we want to center in on is "the preaching of the Cross." What does Paul mean by that? The word "preaching" literally is the Greek word for "word" or "logos": the word of the Cross, or the message of the Cross. What Paul is identifying here is that there is a message that is associated with the Cross. It is that message that is foolishness unto them that are perishing. It's the power of God unto those who are saved. Our question is, "What is the message of the Cross?" What is that message that was a secret, never revealed until revealed to the apostle of the Gentiles?

The message of the Cross was a secret. We want to point out two things. First of all, we want to point out what *was* revealed in the Old Testament about the Cross. In Psalm 22, we find the most vivid and graphic detailed account of the crucifixion that we'll find in all the Old Testament. In fact, not long ago in my ministry, I was sharing with someone who was not too well versed in the Bible and I pointed out to them that the Word of God predicted the Cross. I turned to Psalm 22 and literally their mouth dropped open and they said, "My, I didn't know that was in there." Here you have a graphic description of the Cross, probably around 1,000 years before the Cross ever took place. Listen to this description: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Does that sound familiar? Does that ring a bell? Of course, that's what Christ said from the Cross. Now if you want to compare Scripture with Scripture, here are some cross-references. Matthew 27:46 is where you find Christ crying out that statement. Psalm 22:8 - "He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him!" Compare Matthew 27:43. Remember what they said when Christ was up there, "He saved others. Let Him save Himself. Let Him deliver Himself if He's so special." Again, a fulfillment.

Notice Psalm 22:14 - "I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax." If you are crucified, hanging from your arms, over time that would pull your joints right out of their sockets. Again, a description of the crucifixion. Verse 15 - "My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws." Remember the statement Christ made? John 19:28 - "I thirst." Again, we have the fulfillment of that.

Verse 16 - "For dogs have compassed Me, the assembly of the wicked have enclosed Me, they pierced my hands and my feet." In John 20:27, after the Resurrection, Christ said, "Behold my hands." He fulfilled that. Verse 17 - "I may tell all my bones, they look and stare upon Me." Matthew 27:36 says they sat down and gazed at him. They stared at him. Verse 18 - "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." Again, Matthew 27:35 says that very thing. They cast lots and parted His garments.

Detail after detail about the Cross was revealed. At this point you might be asking, "Why are you telling me that the Cross was a mystery? Or that the message of the Cross was a mystery?" We're distinguishing between the physical aspects of the Cross and its spiritual meaning. Yes, the physical aspect of the Cross was very vividly revealed. But there was something that was never revealed, and that is the true message of the Cross. In I Peter 1, the Apostle Peter makes an interesting statement about what the prophets knew and what they didn't know. Starting in verse 10, "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." There again, it says that the prophets testified of the suffering of Christ, but notice what it says about them - "searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ did signify." In other words, they didn't have any idea what it was talking about. Many times the prophets wrote things down or spoke things and they didn't know what it meant. Or, they didn't know when it was going to happen. God used them as a vessel, as an instrument, but He didn't give them the full understanding of what they were saying. We sometimes have the false notion that the prophets understood everything that they said. Right here the Scripture proves that wrong. They didn't understand everything they said.

But some will say, "But what about Isaiah 53?" There are those who teach that the Gospel of Grace is found just as clearly in Isaiah 53 as it is anywhere else. We want to show you that if you stay with the context of Isaiah 53, that simply isn't so. Did Isaiah understand the Gospel of Grace? Verse 11 **-** "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities." Many would read that and say, "How much clearer can you get? Here you have travailing, you have justification, and you have the bearing of iniquities." Well, how much did they understand? You see, we now have further revelation. As we read those words, it's easy for us to see what that means, isn't it? It's easy for us to understand that. It's Christ that it's talking about. Christ bore our sins, Christ brought justification. But did those people of that time understand that? I believe that they did not.

An example of that is Acts 8:34, where you find the Ethiopian eunuch. God sent Philip down to preach unto him. Do you remember what happened? Philip saw him and the eunuch was reading right out of this text. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you're reading?" And what was his answer? "Oh, yeah, why this is talking about Christ. Why, it says that He died for my sins." Does it say that? No. He said, "How can I understand except some man should guide me?" Some would say, "The Ethiopian eunuch didn't know much, you can't expect him to understand these things." But consider that the Ethiopian eunuch was a devoted man even though he was a Gentile. Under the Law he had traveled for the feast

day on Pentecost to Jerusalem. He was a very dedicated individual. He probably knew as much of the Scriptures as anyone else at that time and yet, he didn't know what it was talking about.

Isaiah 53:6 - "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Some would say, "Surely that teaches the same thing that we understand now. He laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Let's stay in the context. Who is he talking about? Verse 8 - "He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare His generation? for He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was He stricken." Who did He die for in this passage or who did He bear the iniquities for in this passage? For the sins of MY people. Who's writing? Isaiah. Who's Isaiah? A Jew. You see, Isaiah 53 only presents the suffering servant. It doesn't even tell us who it is. We now know who it is. We now know it is Christ, but it doesn't tell us that. The problem is that many people read into Isaiah 53 that which we now know from further revelation.

The whole point that we're trying to make is this. The message of the Cross, the full meaning of the Cross, was simply not known back at that time, before it was revealed to the Apostle Paul.

Let's look at our *second* point, and that is that the message of the Cross was first preached by Paul. Again, some would object. What about Peter's preaching at Pentecost? Acts 2:22 - "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up." That sounds like something Paul might say, doesn't it? It speaks about Christ being slain and being raised again.

But our question is, did Peter preach that as the gospel, as the good news? The answer is, No, he did not. Look at verse 36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Let's think about what is happening. Israel has just been guilty of crucifying Christ. We all admit that. They have crucified Him by wicked hands and now Peter comes along and says, "He's alive!" Put yourself in their place. What if you were guilty of just killing someone and you had done it wickedly, you had murdered someone. What if you were guilty of that and now someone comes along a few days later and says, "You know what? That person you killed is now alive, and He is Lord and Christ. He is very powerful." How would you feel? I'd be a little bit fearful. If I'd just killed someone and now they're alive, I'd think he would probably have a few words for me. Wouldn't you think so? That's exactly what these men are thinking, because look at their response.

If this was being preached as good news, you might expect them to say, "Great! Praise the Lord! He's alive! We want to believe this!" But you see, it wasn't proclaimed as good news. They said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They recognized they were in big trouble. The man they had just killed was now alive and He is Lord. They were in hot water. If the Gospel of Grace was being preached at this time, what would we expect Peter to say? We would expect him to say, "When you crucified Him, Christ died for your sins! He was raised again! Believe that and you'll be saved." But we see he's not preaching the Gospel of Grace. He's not preaching the message of the Cross. He's preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. His message to them is in verse 38 - "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." This is the Kingdom Gospel - the baptism for the remission of sins. Repentance - that was God's message to Israel. You don't find the preaching of the Cross there.

But when you come to the Apostle Paul, then you read the message of the Cross. We need to have this memorized so we can tell someone how to be saved in this dispensation. We don't want to tell them how to be saved back before this dispensation began because that's not how they're saved now. We want to tell them how to be saved in this present time. I Corinthians 15:1 - "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel...For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." Remember, what does Paul call this message? The good news, the gospel. No longer is it a message of terror. "Watch out! The one you killed is now alive!" Now it's a message of comfort and hope; it's good news! Believe and you will be saved. No longer is it "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins." Now it's "believe on Lord Jesus Christ." Believe what He did, what He did for you.

How do we know that this message was withheld until Paul? We know it because Paul says so. I Timothy 2:3-7 –"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour who will have all men be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one meal between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself a ransom for all." When was this message claimed? When was the message first proclaimed Christ is a ransom for all? He tells us right here, "To be testified in due time." When was due time? The next verse tells us.

"Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle speak the truth in Christ, and lie not), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity." If Paul says it is true, and we believe it is as he wrote it under inspiration, then we are to understand that the message that Christ was a ransom for all was not testified until Paul preached it. That's what he himself said. He says the same thing in Titus about it being revealed in due time. "Due time" was when Paul preached it.

The *third* thing we want to point out is that the message the Cross is the very heart of Paul's gospel. Some object our saying "Paul's gospel." Yet, Paul himself used that terminology. In three places he calls his message "my gospel." One of them is in Romans 16:25 and also in II Timothy 2:8 and Romans 2:16. In Romans 16:25, it says, "Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel." Is Paul being proud or haughty? No. He's simply saying it like it is. He calls it his gospel because it is a unique, distinctive message that was committed first to him. That's different than the other apostles, isn't it? The other Twelve Apostles were all committed to the Gospel of the Kingdom, but not one of them could say it was "my gospel" because it was committed to all twelve of them. Only Paul could stand up and say "my gospel." He's the only apostle who ever received a unique message to give to others; therefore, he calls it "my gospel." Romans 2:16 - "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." In II Timothy 2:8, he talks about Jesus Christ being raised according to "my gospel."

Galatians 2 says the same thing. It is very important to understand that Paul preached a unique message. In the first chapter of Galatians, Paul disassociates himself from the Twelve. He wanted us to recognize that he was not one of the Twelve Apostles. In chapter 2, verse 2, he says, "And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them." Who are "them"? It's the others in Jerusalem: Peter, James and John. He says he "communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles." Notice Paul does not say, "I communicated unto them that I preach the gospel." He's not simply informing them that he's also preaching the gospel now. He's telling them <u>what</u> gospel he's preaching! Later on he tells us what it is - the Gospel of the Uncircumcision. I believe this is the same thing; it's the Mystery, it's the Gospel of Grace, it's the message of the Cross plus these other things that go along with the Mystery. Paul preached a unique gospel.

In I Corinthians 2:2, Paul centered in on the preaching of the Cross, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Is that the heart of his message? Absolutely. Christ crucified - the Cross. Another text says in Galatians 6:14 - "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Paul says, here's something we can boast about - the Cross.

Ephesians 2:16 - "And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the Cross." Little words can make such a difference in Scripture. You can see it here - a tiny little word, but it makes all the difference in the world. Many people turn to a passage such as this and they say, "Wait a minute. See! This all took place at the Cross. This all took place when Christ died. Jew and Gentile are brought together now. That all happened way back then at the Cross." Is that what Paul says? Notice how he uses prepositions very carefully. He's talking about Jew and

Gentile being brought in, the wall of partition being brought down. He doesn't say that this happened at the time of the Cross that Jew and Gentile were reconciled at that moment. It happened BY the Cross or because of the Cross. That's what we must understand. What happened at the Cross wasn't revealed until many years later.

Philippians 2:8 - "And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." Philippians 3:18 - "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ." What is an enemy of the Cross?

We sometimes think of enemies of the Cross as people who are anti-God, atheists, or are against the Lord. But if you don't preach the Gospel of Grace, you can be against the Cross. If you're preaching a gospel, for example, the Gospel of the Kingdom, for a different dispensation, you can be preaching against the Cross. Therefore, he says they are enemies of the Cross. It's interesting what he says about them. "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." That's interesting, isn't it? You see, if you preach the earthly message, the message for Israel, "the meek shall inherit the earth," the kingdom on earth, that's not the message of the Cross for this dispensation. Then he goes on, "For our conversation is in Heaven." We preach a heavenly message, and the Cross is at the very heart.

Colossians 1:20 - "And, having made peace through the blood of His Cross." Notice he doesn't say at the time of the Cross, he says *through* the blood of the Cross He made peace, to reconcile all things. Colossians 2:14 - "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His Cross." Christ accomplished all there on the Cross, even though it wasn't testified until due time, whereunto Paul was appointed an apostle, a teacher of the Gentiles.

The message of the Cross was a secret. It was first preached by Paul. It's the very heart of Paul's gospel. We need to know it and know it well. Some people say we spend a lot of time emphasizing that the message of the Cross is found only in Paul's teachings. What about those who do use Isaiah 53 or do go back into the Four Gospels and claim to find the preaching of the Cross back there? My answer is two-fold.

First, as Paul said when he was in prison and wrote to the Philippians, "I thank God that Christ is preached. He may be being preached out of contention or out of strife or even to add affliction to my bonds, but I'm glad he's being preached." That's my first response. Even when people read further revelation into Old Testament passages, I'm glad Christ is being preached. But *secondly,* it sets a dangerous precedent. It establishes the habit of reading into Scripture that which you want to find there. If you think you're going to find a certain message in the

Old Testament and you read it in from another place, what's to keep you from doing that in another passage? What's to keep you from doing that when you come to Paul's Epistles and you have some doctrine you want to find and you read it into that? Let's be consistent with Scripture and not read new revelation or further revelation into former revelation. Let's keep it separate and let's understand that Paul centered in on the Cross and that was the heart of his message.

That leaves us with simply one question at this point - Have you trusted in the message of the Cross? Have you come to understand the preaching of the Cross: that you are saved only by that message - believing that Christ died for *your* sins, that He was buried and rose again? You can't be saved today by repenting and being baptized. You might think you could go off and give an animal sacrifice and that might save you. Well, I'm sorry to have to inform you, that won't do it. You might do any number of things that were a part of God's program, but if that's not what God requires of you now, you're still lost in your sins. So we urge you today, trust in the message of the Cross. That's the message for this dispensation.

Study Questions:

1. List several key aspects of the Mystery.

2. What does Paul mean by the expression, “The preaching of the cross”?

3. The message of the cross was a _____

4. What were some aspects of the cross which *were* foretold in the Old Testament (Psalm 22, etc.)

5. What was *not* revealed about the Cross? (I Peter 1:10, 11; I Cor. 2:7, 8)

6. Is the Gospel of Grace found in Isaiah 53? Explain.

7. The message of the cross was _____ _____ _____ _____ .

8. How did Peter preach the crucifixion to the Israelites in Acts 2:36? Explain.

9. When was the cross first proclaimed as *Good News*? (cp. II Tim. 2:6, 7; Titus 1:3)

10. The message of the cross is the _____ of _____.

11. How do we know Paul preached a unique Gospel? (Rom. 16:25)

12. Give some examples of the prominence of the cross in Paul’s teaching.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MYSTERY & THE GENTILES

"If ye have heard of the Dispensation of the Grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation He made known unto me the Mystery" (Ephesians 3:2-3).

One of the tendencies among people who have been greatly blessed is to take those blessings for granted. I believe one of the greatest examples of this is those of us who live in our beloved country of America. We have become very accustomed to the blessings that we enjoy even on a physical level. We've gotten used to walking into the department store and finding far more selection than we could possibly ever use or need or even want. We have become used to the fact that we can walk into a grocery store and pick up just about any kind of food from anywhere in the world that we can imagine. We're used to the fact that there's more than we could possibly use. There's abundance. It's hard for us to imagine any other way, isn't it? It's hard for us to imagine our forefathers who came from other countries and settled here; and who, in the words of some, bet the government $18.00 that they could live for five years on a piece of land and homestead it. We forget that they often started out with nothing more than a hole in the ground they had to dig themselves. We forget that they spent many a night going without the necessities of life. And that's only three or four generations ago that things were like this. How quickly things can change. But we have become accustomed to these kinds of blessings.

Another example which pertains to the Scriptures is the example of being a Gentile during this Dispensation of Grace. We have come to take it for granted that as Gentiles we can come directly to God. We have instant access through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not through anything that we've done, but understanding that He has opened up a way for us to come to God. It's difficult for us to imagine it any other way. And yet, as we're going to see today, it was not always the way it is now. As Gentiles, I believe it is very important for us to come to appreciate our present condition under grace.

We want to center in on two more aspects of the Mystery. These will be two aspects that pertain directly to Gentiles. Just to review those in our minds, let's begin with the first passage in Romans 11. The *first* thing we want to consider is that God is doing a Gentile work today during the period of Israel's blindness. According to Romans 11:25, that fact was a mystery, it was a secret. Nowhere in the Old Testament will you read that God was going to do a Gentile work during

a period of Israel's blindness. You do read in the Old Testament that Israel would be blinded; that was foretold. You do read in the Old Testament that Gentiles could rejoice in the truth. You do see that Gentiles could be a part of God's work and plan. But it all had to do in relationship and in the context of the nation of Israel. We must understand the fact that God would do a separate Gentile work during Israel's blindness was a mystery. Romans 11:25 - "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this Mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." What he is saying is that God would complete a work among the Gentiles. The fullness of the Gentiles is the completion of a Gentile program during Israel's blindness.

A second aspect of the Mystery is the fact that God has joined both Jew and Gentile into one body in this present age. Ephesians 2 & 3 tell us that God would join both Jew and Gentile into one body. Again, we confirm that was a mystery, it was a secret. Nowhere in the Old Testament do you have Jew and Gentile predicted as coming together on equal grounds, with equal standing. That was a secret.

Before we consider these two points, we want to first look at how it used to be, just as it is helpful for us as Americans to go back and study a bit of our history so that we can better appreciate what we have now; likewise, it's good for us, as Gentiles living in this dispensation, to look back and to see how it was before the Mystery was revealed.

In order to do this, we want to begin by examining Gentiles under the Kingdom program. We want to see how God dealt with them at that time. Romans 15 is an explanation of Christ's earthly ministry. Before we read this verse, we must first explain something. We must understand that way back at the beginning of time, there was no such thing as a Jew. When God created the human race, all the people, all the nations that He created were considered Gentiles. That's because Gentiles are considered non-Jews. If there aren't any Jews, then everyone is a Gentile. In fact, if you'll go back to Genesis 10, you will find it does call the people of the earth at that time Gentiles. It's not until Genesis 12 that you have the calling of Abraham as a special unique family to become a special nation. Not until after that do you have any Jews. In fact, they weren't called Jews until sometime after that. Originally, Abraham's family were referred to as Hebrews and then later on, one of the tribes which was called Judah, became very large and became known as the tribe of Judah. It was shortened to the name Jew.

Why did God call Abraham? We know God called Abraham because the Gentiles had rebelled against the will of God for them. So God turned in His dealings and chose one man through whom He hoped to reach the Gentile nations. That was the whole purpose of the calling of the nation of Israel. As Abraham was sent out from his homeland Ur of the Chaldees, into a land that God would show him, we now know to be Palestine or the land of Canaan, and that became his land, the

land of the Israelites. Those people were to be a testimony to all the nations of the earth. God designed that through Israel's blessings, as Israel received blessings from God, both spiritual and physical blessings, the nations of the earth would look and consider why they were so blessed. They would come and inquire and Israel could tell them that they were blessed because they only worshipped the one true God, and then the nations would be turned to God.

That was the way it was supposed to work. We know by reading the history that we find in the Bible, that it didn't always work out that way. In fact, by the time of Christ, Israel had utterly and miserably failed in her responsibility, and consequently, was in no condition to point the Gentiles to God. They didn't even have a very good relationship with God themselves. So when Christ came, He did not come with the initial intention of starting some new work. He came to bring Israel back into the relationship that she should have had with God, so that Israel could go out and minister to the nations.

Now, that brings us to Romans 15:8 - "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision." Who are they? The Israelites. The covenant of circumcision was given way back in Genesis 17 to Abraham. "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers." What were the promises made to the fathers? That they would be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. That they would be the covenant people and that through their ministry all of the people can be blessed. So when Christ came He was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God confirming to the Israelites those principles of the covenant. They were supposed to get back to that covenant.

That's not to say the Gentiles couldn’t have a part in it. Notice in verse 9 - "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, for this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name." After Israel had the promises confirmed to them, they were to in turn go out and minister among the Gentiles. So we are not saying that Gentiles couldn't be saved before this dispensation, we're simply saying that they had to come through the channel of the Israelites.

Let's go back to Matthew 10 and notice that Christ's ministry was consistent with what we just read in Romans 15: 8. Christ was a minister of the circumcision. Notice in Matthew 10 as He sends His Disciples out, how He instructs them and to whom they were to go. Verse 5 - "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans, enter ye not." Why not? That sounds like an unusual command, doesn't it? And yet he says in verse 6, "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." In other words, how can the Israelites minister to the Gentiles if they are lost themselves? So rather than go directly to the Gentiles - don't do that, Christ said. Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then later on, in Matthew 28, you find a greater commission, but it's still in context with the

Kingdom program. It does say go to all nations. But who is He sending to all nations at that time? He's sending the Twelve Apostles: those who will be sitting on the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

You see, the commission in Matthew 10 is for the purpose of getting Israel saved. The disciples were to go out and convert the Israelites and bring them back to the Lord. The commission in Chapter 28 is for redeemed Israel to go out and reach the Gentiles. That is not the commission we are under today. We are not redeemed Israel going out to reach the Gentiles. We have what I like to call the greatest commission. That's in II Corinthians 5:20, and it says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." That's the greatest commission ever given. You find a *great* commission given in Matthew 10, a *greater* commission given in Matthew 28 and the *greatest* commission in II Corinthians 5.

Let's notice some specific cases of Christ ministering to Gentiles. When we say that Christ ministered only to the circumcision and that He went only to the Jew, almost inevitably someone will say, "Wait a minute! I know Christ ministered among the Gentiles when He was on earth." Some people even have the idea that it was common for Christ to minister among the Gentiles. What we want to show you is that there were only two or three cases in all of the Four Gospels where Christ ever ministered directly unto a Gentile. And even in these cases, it wasn't always even that direct.

Why do I say two or three? It depends on if you include the Samaritan woman. Remember the Samaritans are half Jews. Christ did minister to the Samaritan woman, but even then, what did He say to her? Where does salvation come from according to John 47 Salvation is of the Jews. So even as He ministered to the Samaritan woman, He reminded her that salvation was of the Jews.

In Matthew 15, we have an amazing passage of Scripture. Starting in verse 21 - "Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." You will notice right off the bat she recognizes the place of Christ, "Thou Son of David." She recognizes His origin and she recognizes that she has to come through that channel. Verse 23 -"But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us." Can you believe this? Here's a Gentile coming to the Lord begging Him even as a Son of David and it says He answered her not a word. The picture I see is that Christ is literally ignoring her. He is simply going about His business and acting as though He didn't even hear what she said. The disciples were very gracious, weren't they? They said, "Lord, send her away." They didn't want her around. Verse 24 - "But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Christ was true to His

mission. I'm sure He had compassion, but even now as this Gentile comes, He realizes it is not the time yet to minister unto the Gentiles.

Verse 25 - "Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs." That's an amazing statement; it gives us great insight into how things used to be. Who are the children? The children of Israel. "It is not meet (or fit or proper) for me to take that which really belongs to the children and cast it to the dogs." Was Christ kind and gracious and loving? Yes, He was. And yet He calls her in so many words, a dog. Why? That was the Jewish terminology for the Gentiles. "You're a Gentile dog."

But notice her great understanding of the program she was under. Verse 27 - "And she said, Truth, Lord." She's not arguing, she's not saying, "How dare you!" She says, "That's absolutely true, I understand that I am a dog. I understand that in this program that we are presently in I don't have the right to go directly to the table and eat." But notice her great understanding, "Yet, the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." She was willing to take that secondary position. She understood how it was supposed to work. I wonder how she understood that. Christ marvels at her great faith. Verse 28 - "Then Jesus answered and said unto her, Oh, woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." You see, this woman understood and the Lord confirms her understanding that she had no right to come and eat at the table. It's not proper to have the dog sit at the table, but there may be a place to brush a few crumbs off and let the dog clean it up. They were only welcome at the table when the children were full.

When do you brush the crumbs off? You usually wait until everyone has had their fill and give the leftovers to the dogs.

That's what God intended. Fill the children first and then from the overflow of blessing, the Gentiles can partake. That's not to say that there wouldn't be any blessing left. God is very gracious and blesses bountifully. So as the Israelites were filled, God would provide enough blessings so that the Gentiles could have some of the overflow.

Christ, I believe, makes an exception in this case. This is not the normal course of things in this period of time. He does recognize that she does see her place as a Gentile dog, not worthy of eating at the table. Therefore, He goes ahead and He does bless her.

Another similar example is in Luke 7: 1. Here we find a centurion, a soldier, who had authority over one-hundred men, who again recognizes his subservient place in that program. “Now when He had ended all His sayings in the audience of the people, He entered into Capernaum and a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto Him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he

sent unto Him the elders of the Jews, beseeching Him that He would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought Him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this." Why was he worthy? Was he a Gentile that did not understand the place of Israel at that time? No, he understands. Notice what he has done. Verse 5 - "For he loveth our nation." Remember the original promise under the covenant that God gave to Abraham? Those who bless you will be blessed. Those who curse you will be cursed. Here's a Gentile blessing Israel. "And He hath built us a synagogue." Not only had he loved Israel, but he had done something for them.

Verse 6 - "Then Jesus went with them. And when He was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying unto Him, Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof." Does he understand where he fits in? He certainly does! He realizes that he doesn't have any right to simply claim the presence of the Lord and the blessings that He can provide. He realizes that he is unworthy. Notice in verse 7, "Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed Him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." The Lord recognizes a Gentile who has great faith who recognizes his subservient position.

Notice that in both of these cases under the Kingdom program, the Gentiles are only blessed as they recognize their proper place under Israel and then the blessings could come to them. But let me tell you how different things are under grace. We are in a different dispensation, so let's spend a few moments looking at Gentiles under grace.

The Mystery program has changed the condition of Gentiles. Romans 11:25 says, "For I would not, brethren, that ye be ignorant of this Mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits." In other words, Paul is saying don't become proud of our present condition as Gentiles because we aren't the ones who earned this position. We don't have this because of any merit of our own, the Lord has done it for us.

First, he says, "Blindness in part is happened to Israel." Israel is presently blinded. That's not to say that all Israelites are blinded. There are, thankfully, Jewish people of the Hebrew race who come to Christ. There are those who simply come in faith, trusting in Christ, and they can be saved. But they aren't saved the way they used to be saved. They aren't saved anymore by going back to those covenants. They aren't saved anymore by observing the Law in faith. They are saved by coming under the same basis as Gentiles come.

The *second* part is that God will complete a Gentile work. That's really what makes this present age unique. Never before has God interrupted a program and then finished another one while He is waiting to return to the former program. But that's what God did with Israel. He interrupted His Kingdom program right before the Tribulation period was supposed to begin. That's why this is called the Dispensation of Grace - because God is now postponing judgment.

Consider where we stood before this dispensation as Gentiles and where we stand now. *First* of all, in Ephesians 2:11-13, Paul makes a list of seven things that were working against us as Gentiles. "Wherefore, remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who were called uncircumcision." That's the *first* thing working against the Gentiles in the former age. Under the Kingdom program, being uncircumcised meant you couldn't have a part in the covenant. And if you weren't part of the covenant, you were to be cut off from the people. The only way to get blessings was when the blessings flowed through Israel.

The *second* thing against us was "ye were without Christ." The word Christ means Messiah. We were without the Messiah. God never promised that the Gentiles could have direct access to the Messiah. If you wanted access to the Messiah, you had to come to Israel.

Thirdly, we "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel." A commonwealth is when you have a nation that is greatly blessed and they take someone in under their wings and they actually gain all of the privileges and immunities and blessings of being a citizen of that country. It was the same way with Israel. As Gentiles, before this dispensation, we had no access to that commonwealth unless we would become Jews.

The *fourth,* we were "strangers from the covenants of promise." The covenants were the basis of the blessings at that time.

Fifth, "having no hope." Obviously, if you don't have direct access to the covenants and promises of God, then you have no hope. You have no hope of a coming Messiah or a coming kingdom.

Sixth, "without God in the world." This is one occasion where we find the word "atheist" in the Bible. A true atheist is someone who is unsaved. We usually think of an atheist as someone who doesn't believe in God. But deep down, I wonder if there really is someone who doesn't believe in God. They may say they don't believe in God, and to a certain degree they may not believe in God now, but believe me, they're going to believe in God someday. It may be too late, it may be after they are already in the Lake of Fire, but they're going to believe in God someday. But today, to be an atheist, is to be without God: to not have God through faith in Christ.

Seventh, "they were far off." That suggests a distance. The Gentiles were never close to the place of blessings.

In verse 14, we find an interesting statement, "For He is our peace, who hath made both one (Jew and Gentile) and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us." What is that middle wall of partition? I believe there are two senses in which to take it. *First* of all, there was a figurative wall that was built up. The Gentiles did feel separated from the Jews. And that is because the Jews had been blessed and they had kept it to themselves. Some of them at least became a bit prejudiced. But there was also a literal wall. I believe Paul is referring to that as well. Back in Paul's day, before the Temple was destroyed, there was a wall around the Temple. This wall extended around the entire courtyard. But inside there was a second wall and this was, what I believe Paul refers to, the partition. You might have heard about the court of the Gentiles. This was the first courtyard. After you got beyond the first wall, you as a Gentile could approach only so far, but then, there was a second wall. The historian, Josephus, describes it as being about five feet high, three cubits high; and this wall had an inscription on it. Archaeologists have uncovered it and it says, "No Gentile may enter within the railing around the sanctuary and within the enclosure. Whosoever should be caught, shall render himself liable to the death penalty which will inevitably follow." In other words, cross this line as a Gentile and you are dead.

But what has happened in Christ? Verse 14 - "And hath broken down the middle wall of partition." In Christ that wall is done away. There are no more limits on the Gentiles entering in and having access to God. Our present condition as Gentiles is that we have equal standing with Jews. There are two ways in which we have equal standing. We have equal standing before salvation and after salvation. First of all, before salvation, both Jew and Gentile are under sin. In Romans 3:9 Paul says that God has "concluded both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." Chapter 11 also says God has concluded them all under sin. Someone has said the ground is level at the foot of the Cross. In this dispensation, when you approach God and come at the foot of the Cross, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile. Nobody is at a higher level. We are all in the same condition, regardless of nationality or social status, everyone must come today on the same basis in simple faith: bringing nothing, just trusting in Christ.

But alter salvation, we are also equal. In Galatians 3, Paul talks about the fact that in Christ there is no male or female, there is no Jew or Gentile, there is no bond or free; in Christ we are all the same. We all have equal access to all spiritual blessings in Christ.

Yet, something strikes me as we look at Christianity today. Many Christians are still clamoring after the crumbs that fall from Israel’s table. What do I mean by this? Under the Kingdom program, many of the blessings that God promised

were physical blessings. Material wealth was a physical blessing. You read in the Old Testament that God blessed Abraham and then it lists all the livestock he had and the material wealth he had. That was a legitimate blessing at that time, given by God.

But that's not the kind of blessing that's been promised to us in this dispensation. Many are clamoring after all of the blessings of Israel when they could have (and if they are saved, they do have and don't know it) the unsearchable riches of Christ. How unfortunate that we would be satisfied with those lesser blessings when we can have the greatest blessing that God has ever offered. Imagine being seated with Christ in the heavenlies!

Remember the two disciples who came with their mother and asked if they could sit at the Lord's left and right hand in His kingdom? They were asking for quite a privilege, weren't they? Yet according to the Word of God, those who are saved in this dispensation are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places. We already have a greater blessing than these two fellows wanted. We have the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the moment we believe, places a seal and actually becomes the seal Himself on our salvation. That's a blessing we enjoy in this present dispensation. We are joint heirs with Christ. I can't fathom what that means and yet, our name is going to be one of those that receives the great inheritance that Christ receives. We are joint heirs with Christ. We all have that same blessing.

Study Questions:

1. What do we tend to take for granted as Gentiles?

2. List the two elements of the Mystery which relate directly to Gentiles:

3. What was the purpose of Christ's earthly ministry? Give Scripture:

4. Explain how Gentiles relate to Israel in these two passages:
   Matt. 15:21-28 –
   Luke 7:1-10 –

5. What is unique about this present age?

6. Describe our former alienation from, and enmity with Israel. (Eph. 2:11-14)

7. List two ways in which Gentiles are on equal standing with Jews:

CHAPTER EIGHT

OUR BLESSED HOPE

> *“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).*

Of all the subjects in the Word of God, surely the Rapture is one of the most fascinating. The very idea of being here on this earth one moment and then suddenly vanishing and finding ourselves in the presence of the Lord the next moment without having to go through death, is certainly an attractive prospect, isn't it? In fact, this may be part of the reason why Paul refers to the Rapture as a blessed hope. Titus 2:11 - "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

To be among that blessed company of those who are living when the Lord returns in the Rapture would be a glorious thing. Wouldn't it be wonderful to leave this life without facing the sting of death? Wouldn't it be wonderful to leave this earth and be ushered directly into the presence of the Lord? That is a great blessing. To be there when the Lord descends from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, and suddenly be ushered into the presence of those who have gone before, and to meet the Lord in the air. These are surely going to be great blessings.

But I think there are other ways that the Rapture will be a blessing. For one thing, it offers the possibility of escaping some of the present trouble we are facing in this present life. I remember many times in Bible Institute on the days of the final exam, we looked forward to the Rapture! We thought there couldn't be a better time than right before the professor handed us that sheet.

There are more serious times when we are facing great trouble in our life. Those times when we are facing great suffering and trials. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Lord would come and snatch us out of those times?

Yet for many, the Rapture is a frightening time. For those who are unsaved, the Rapture doesn't look very attractive at all. To the unsaved the Rapture means separation from believing loved ones. There is going to come a time when that unsaved husband will come home to an empty house. His believing wife and

children will have been taken and will have left to meet the Lord in the air. There will come a time when perhaps that young person who would not listen to his parents as they shared the gospel, or would not listen to the Sunday School teacher or the pastor, will come home from school and find Mom and Dad are gone. That's going to be a very real thing to some people. So for some people who don't know the Lord, they may find out too late what the Rapture is all about. I believe it is very important that we understand what the Rapture is and more importantly, that we be prepared for the Rapture.

We're going to look at three things about the Rapture and by the end of our study, I think you will agree that the Rapture is a blessed hope.

The Secret of the Rapture

The Rapture is a part of the Secret, or the Mystery, given to Paul only after Israel had been given every opportunity to receive their Kingdom and their Messiah and totally rejected Christ. Then God revealed the Mystery. When we come to I Corinthians 15:51, we find that the Rapture is a part of this Mystery or this secret. The Apostle Paul says, "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." For the Christian, death is often referred to as sleep. Don't misunderstand, the Bible doesn't teach that our soul goes to sleep. It teaches that our body goes to sleep. So when we die, if we are a Christian, we go to sleep. But Paul says we shall not all sleep. To understand why he's calling this truth a mystery or a secret, we have to understand a little bit about the context in which we find it in I Corinthians 15.

This is the great resurrection chapter in the Bible. It's not the only place in the Bible we read about resurrection, but it is perhaps the greatest chapter on resurrection. We find more information here on the resurrection than we'll find anywhere else, all in one chapter. The problem Paul is addressing is that some people didn't believe in resurrection. That's hard to even fathom, that people who called themselves Christians didn't believe in resurrection. But that's really what Paul is saying. How can you not believe in resurrection when the resurrection is the very basis of our faith? Indeed, he says it is part of the gospel for this age. Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again according to the Scriptures and Paul points out to them that if they did no believe this, then their belief is in vain. Their faith is empty if it doesn't include a belief in resurrection.

As Paul goes on, the first 19 verses outline the proof and the importance of the resurrection. In verses 20 through 28 he explains the resurrection as it relates to Old Testament prophecy. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." That is not, by the way, talking about our salvation. It's talking about the fact that everyone will be raised someday. It doesn't matter whether you believe or don't believe, you will be raised. Those who believe will be taken to be

with the Lord. Those who do not believe will be raised to face judgment and be cast in the Lake of Fire. Paul's point is, through Adam everyone ended up dying, through Christ, everyone will again be raised.

Verse 23 says, "Every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, afterward they that are Christ's at His coming. Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father." At this point, all Paul has done is outlined the prophetic program and how resurrection relates to that. He is not talking about the Rapture yet. He's talking about the second coming of Christ, when those who are Christ's at that time (which we know now will be those from the Tribulation period, and those who died in the Old Testament economy, the Kingdom economy), will be raised and then cometh the end. Then Paul goes on and explains more about resurrection.

Not until verse 51 does he bring up the Mystery. He has already outlined the prophetic order of resurrection and it's as though he's saying, "I still have to tell you one thing. That is, there is a mystery that was not revealed in the Old Testament." Everything he's talked about so far was revealed in the Old Testament. Christ's resurrection was revealed there, Christ was raised according to the Scriptures. The fact that He would raise some at the return of Christ was found in Old Testament Scriptures. But there is one thing you don't read about there when it comes to resurrection. You don’t read about the Rapture. You will not find the Rapture in the Old Testament Scriptures nor in the Four Gospels. It was still a mystery at that time.

The Rapture is actually resurrection day for the Body of Christ. That's why it's so important for us to understand it. It's our resurrection day. Some people say, "I wish I were around for the Rapture." If you are saved, you will get in on the Rapture. You may have died and been buried, but you will get in on the Rapture. You just may not be alive yet at the time of the Rapture.

The Rapture was still a mystery when Christ taught His disciples. In Matthew 24, the Twelve Disciples were not told that they would be caught away before the Tribulation period came. In fact, in Matthew 24, they were told to prepare for the Tribulation period and to be expecting it. Verse 13 - "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." The end of what? Stay in context. The end of the Tribulation period. "And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place." The abomination of desolation is that time when the Antichrist or beast will enter the Temple of the Jews and proclaim himself to be God and require that the people of the earth worship him as God. That will be a great abomination.

Now, does Christ say to His Twelve Apostles, "You don't have to worry about that, because you won't even be here"? No, he says, "When ye therefore shall

see this." They fully expected to enter into the Tribulation period. This is part of the reason why some people do not believe in a pre-tribulation Rapture. We will discuss later why we believe in a pre-tribulation Rapture. But one of the reasons some people don't is because they confuse the ministry of the Twelve Apostles with the ministry of the Apostle Paul. If the Twelve Apostles were the apostles of this dispensation, then we could expect to go into the Tribulation period, because Christ told them to expect to go into it. But if we understand that Paul is our apostle in this dispensation, then we know clearly that we are not going to enter into the Tribulation period.

The Scope of the Rapture

In I Corinthians 15, there are two major elements involved in the Rapture. The *first* major element is the change in our bodies. Verse 51 continues, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." In other words, our bodies are going to undergo a change at the time of the Rapture. If we are still alive at that point, our bodies will be changed without ever having to go through death. Those who have died, will have changed bodies, too. But Paul is centering in on those who will still be alive. The word for "change" is simply "to make different." We might ask the question, "How will our bodies be different at the time of the Rapture?" Paul does explain more about this if you back up in the passage a little bit. Notice in verse 42, Paul is answering some of the questions people had. One of the questions was, "What kind of a body will we have in the resurrection?" In verse 42, Paul says, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory."

So we have learned two things already, we will have an incorruptible body, one that never decays or dies or gets sick anymore; and we will have a glorious body. Verse 43 continues, "It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." So, rather than having the kind of weaknesses we have now, we will have very strong bodies. Verse 44 - "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." Then in verse 49 -"And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." That tells us what our new bodies will be like. We were born in the image of the earthly, Adam. But we will be like the heavenly, Christ, in His resurrection body. Paul comments further in Philippians where he says we are citizens of Heaven and looking for the Savior. He goes on to say that He will some day fashion our bodies like after Christ's body. "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Philippians 3:21).

A *second* major element of the Rapture is our location will be changed as well. We will leave this earth and arrive in the air with the Lord. I Thessalonians 4:17 - "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." The word "caught up" is where we get our word for Rapture. The Greek word is "harpazo," but in the Latin, it is the word

"raptus" or rapture. This is the basis for calling this great and glorious event the Rapture. Even in the English language we use the word rapture when we hear something beautiful. We are enraptured with it, we are caught up with something. The word means to be "caught up" or "caught away." The same word is found in Acts 8:39 where Phillip is ministering to the Ethiopian eunuch and the Scripture says the Spirit caught him away. He simply disappeared from there and was found somewhere else. That's how it will be at the time of the Rapture. We will disappear from the face of the earth, and we will be found with the Lord in the air.

That's *what* it involves, now *who* does it involve? First of all, generally, it involves the Body of Christ. It involves only those saved in this dispensation. There are those who have taught that at the time of the Rapture, everyone will be raised from any dispensation. But that simply is not true, as we have shown in previous studies. Those who are a part of the Old Testament Kingdom program for Israel will not be raised until right before the Kingdom, after the Tribulation period. But we who have been saved in this dispensation, beginning with Paul's ministry, back in the middle of the Book of Acts, all the way until the Rapture, these are the ones who will be involved in the Rapture: the Body of Christ.

We can distinguish two elements of the Body of Christ. In I Thessalonians 4:16 - "For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." What does it mean to die in Christ? The Bible speaks of two men and two positions in life. You are either in Adam or you are in Christ. If you've never been saved, you are still in Adam. You are a blood relative of that man. You are related to an offspring of Adam. If you are not saved, you are still in that position. But that's a bad position to be in. You want to be in Christ, for only the dead in Christ shall be raised first. Those who were saved and have already died in this dispensation will be raised. The living will also be involved. Verse 17 - "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." First, you have the dead in Christ being raised, and then you have the living, all caught up together to be with the Lord.

The Sequence of the Rapture

In what order do these events take place? There are five major steps or stages of the Rapture. I Thessalonians 4:16 tells of the descent of Christ. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven." Where is Christ today? Christ is in Heaven. After Christ finished the work of salvation, the Scripture says He ascended and sat down at the right hand of God. This pictures for us a finished salvation. He sat down because the work was done.

It says He will descend with a shout. People have speculated what this shout will involve. I don't suppose we'll totally answer the question of what He's shouting about, but I wonder if He isn't shouting, "Wake up!" to all those bodies that have

died and are lying in the grave. The Lord literally has a voice that can raise the dead. Some day, just as He shouted into the tomb of Lazarus, He will shout and raise the bodies of those saints who have died and bring them forth out of their graves.

Then it says, "with the voice of the archangel." There will be angels who accompany the Lord. Next it says "with the trump of God." Over in I Corinthians, it is called the last trump. Now be very careful when you read that. Some have confused the last trump with the Seventh Trumpet of the Book of Revelation. If you do that, you're going to end up with some problems. You'll wind up with the Church, the Body of Christ, going through the Tribulation period. We must understand that the way Paul uses this word "the last trump", is distinctive and he has a purpose for using it that way. Stam, in his commentary on I Corinthians writes, "The term 'the last trump' is a military expression, denoting the trumpet which is sounded at the last for the close of this dispensation." That is, to call the soldiers home. What a beautiful picture! God blowing that last trumpet, summoning all the soldiers back home. In II Timothy 2:3, Paul uses this same image of a soldier. "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." So when we read of the last trump, think of that final call as the soldiers are summoned home.

The *second* step is the resurrection of believing saints. The dead in Christ will rise first. Paul emphasizes this because those who he is writing to had been taught that those who had died will miss the Rapture. Paul is trying to re-emphasize the fact that those who have died will not miss the Rapture. In fact, not only will they not miss it, they will be the first ones who get to be raised and changed. They will indeed be a part of this.

The *third* step that will happen is the transformation of living saints, as found in I Corinthians 15.

Number four is the actual catching away. Verse 17 - "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together." Someday the believers will simply disappear from the face of the earth. I've wondered sometimes what that will be like. Wouldn't it be wonderful if it happened as you were sitting in church? But wouldn't it be a shock if you were sitting there all alone in your pew? I sometimes wonder, in churches where the gospel is not preached, if they will notice that anything happened? I sometimes wonder in churches where they don't proclaim the blood of Christ and the death, burial and resurrection, when the Rapture comes, if maybe they will still have a full house. Maybe the preacher will go on preaching as if nothing happened. I certainly hope that isn't the case with you.

People have conjectured how the world will explain the sudden disappearance of millions of people. I personally believe that by the time the Rapture comes, the church will probably be in such a state of apostasy, there probably won't be that

many people who will go. For those few who are truly saved and are missing from the face of the earth, it will probably be said that they were taken by UFO's or something similar.

The *fifth* thing that will happen is the meeting in the air "To meet the Lord in the air." What a family reunion that will be! All the way from the Apostle Paul, all the great saints from the history of the Church, all of those loved ones who have gone before in Christ, will be there.

But there is one more thing we want to discuss about the sequence of the Rapture. Some years ago I sat in the home of a family who had invited a woman over who was very concerned about the Tribulation period. She was so concerned that she had actually begun to prepare for it. She was planning to buy a horse, because there probably wouldn't be the free flow of gasoline after these events started happening. She was planning to buy dry food that could be preserved and kept for the seven years that would be necessary. She was really concerned; she wasn't just being silly. She had a genuine burden for being prepared for the Tribulation period. After a couple of hours, she finally began to open up to the Word of God and what is really taught in Scripture, and to understand the difference between Prophecy and Mystery. What a joy it was to see a visible sense of relief come over her face!

Why do we teach that the Body of Christ will not go through the Tribulation period? Let us consider three reasons:

Reason #1: The Rapture ends the Mystery program. If we understand that God has two programs: a program for Israel and a program for the Church, the Body of Christ, and if we realize that He does not mix these two, then we can understand that when He ends this dispensation with the Rapture, He will then pick up with Israel's program and the next item on prophecy is the Tribulation period. The reason many people get the Church of this age into the Tribulation period in their theology is because they don’t rightly divide the Prophetic program for Israel and the Mystery program for the Body of Christ.

Reason #2: The Tribulation is for the benefit of Israel, not for the benefit of the Body of Christ. Jeremiah 30:7 - "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it. It is even the time of Jacob's trouble." Who is Jacob? Jacob is Israel before his name was changed. It is significant that you find God saying it is the time of Jacob's trouble. Why doesn't He say it is the time of Israel's trouble? That's because when you read about Jacobs' life, often you will find that when he is walking with the Lord in fellowship, he is called Israel. But when he is walking according to the flesh, disobedient to God, he is called Jacob. That's why we read here it is a time of Jacob's trouble. Because it is Israel in disobedience, not walking with the Lord and the Tribulation period is designed to bring them to their senses and to get them to look to God for help. That's not the method or purpose for the Body of Christ. To the contrary, Paul teaches that this age will not end

with a revival. Actually, the Tribulation ends with Israel turning to the Lord. It ends with a revival. But that is not how this dispensation will end. It will end with apostasy. We could give you many Scriptures, but Paul says "evil men will wax worse and worse" and things will get very bad.

Reason #3: We are not appointed to wrath. I Thessalonians 1:9 - "For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." What's the wrath to come? The great day of God's wrath when He pours out His anger on the sin of the world. People often ask, "Why doesn't God do something about evil?" The answer is, "He's going to." You had better be glad you're not going to be here when He does. You had better be saved so you're not here when He does. The Tribulation period is the outpouring of God's wrath on evil. It is intensified by the fact that it is the pouring out of Satan's wrath as well.

Paul says we're delivered from the wrath to come. Notice in Chapter 5 - "But of the times and season, brethren, ye have no need that write unto you." Those are some very key words. God's plan for Israel is called the "times and seasons." Israel was on a prophetic time clock, we are not. Verse 9 - "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." Again, he reaffirms this truth. He also reaffirms it in II Thessalonians 2:13. In the context of verses 3 through 12, Paul is talking about the great Tribulation period. In verse 7, he says, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only He who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, (the Beast, the Antichrist)." Verse 9 - "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs, and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness.... " Then down in verse 13, notice what he says, "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." He's not talking about spiritual salvation, he's talking about deliverance, salvation from the Tribulation period. From the beginning, God has chosen that those who are members of the Body of Christ would not go through that time.

Let me be quick to qualify. I am not saying that we will not experience tribulations (plural) in this life. We will, and we do. The Apostle Paul speaks of those times. Romans 5 says, "Tribulation worketh patience." We do experience tribulations. But we will not experience the Great Tribulation, or The Tribulation. We are to be delivered before that time. Even though we face tribulations in this life, our sufferings aren't anything like the sufferings those people will go through. The Tribulation period will be a time like this world has never seen nor will ever see afterwards.

You can be spared from that time by trusting Christ. Are you ready for the Rapture? Do you wish it came today? I remember growing up as a little child hearing preachers preach about the Rapture, the return of Christ, and thinking, "That sounds all right, but I'm not sure I want that to happen yet." At first I was not sure because I wasn't sure I was saved. And I have to confess later I wasn't sure I was ready for the Rapture because I wasn't sure I was ready to give up this life. We tend to cling to the things of this world. And yet we have to come to a point in our life when we realize that the Rapture is our blessed hope to deliver us from the trials and tribulations. What a glorious prospect! When we're walking with the Lord, we're ready for the Rapture. Are you saved? Are you walking with the Lord? I trust that you are. You can be by simple faith.

Study Questions:

1. Why is the Rapture our blessed hope? (Titus 2:13)

2. Discuss the context of I Corinthians 15 in relation to the secret of the Rapture.

3. Why does Paul call the Rapture a “mystery”?

4. Discuss two major elements of the scope of the Rapture.
   I Cor. 15:52, 53 –
   I Thess. 4:17 –

5. What group of people will participate in the Rapture?

6. What are the five major steps in the sequence of the Rapture? (I Thess. 4: 16, 17)

7. List three major reasons we know the Rapture will be pretribulational.

8. Are *you* ready for the Rapture?!?

CHAPTER NINE

ONE BODY...ONE BAPTISM

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

One of the unique features of this Dispensation of Grace is the relationship that believers have with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is such a close relationship that the Scripture refers to it as the head and the body. We are the body of Christ. In Ephesians 5:30 -"For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." You can't get much closer than that, can you? We understand that the Apostle is using a metaphor or an illustration to show that close, unique relationship that we have with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I say it is a unique feature of this dispensation, because believers in other ages never enjoyed that privilege of being members of His body. In former ages under the Kingdom program, the Prophetic program, believers were part of a nation, part of a kingdom. But they were never part of a body in the sense that we are. We enjoy a very unique situation. Of all of the forty human writers of Scripture, only one mentions this unique relationship; of course, that is the Apostle Paul. It's only in this dispensation that we have this blessed position of being part of the body of Christ. That's a special message given to the Apostle of the Gentiles for this dispensation.

As I considered what to say about the Body of Christ in this book on the Mystery, I soon became overwhelmed. The Apostle Paul says so much about the Body of Christ. So rather than trying to exhaust the subject, I decided to center on one central feature of the Body of Christ: that is, the one baptism that joins us to the Body of Christ. I believe it is one of the most important aspects of the Body of Christ because it instructs us on how we can be a part of this glorious organism, the Body of Christ, through the one baptism.

Satan is a crafty foe and he often uses the very words of Scripture to try and confuse us. I believe that nowhere is this seen so clearly as in this matter of baptism. Many churches today teach that you are not saved unless you have been baptized. Actually, there is a sense in which that is true. We will point that out later. I would say the same thing. You are not saved unless you are baptized; but I would quickly say that I am not talking about a water baptism, I am talking about a spiritual baptism. We're going to see that unless you have been baptized with this spiritual baptism, you are not a part of the Body of Christ.

Those who say you have to be baptized in order to be saved are usually thinking of the wrong kind of baptism. They are usually thinking of some kind of water baptism. But the Bible speaks of many different kinds of baptism. Scholars have come up with many different numbers, but most Grace writers teach that there are at least twelve different kinds of baptism. We won't take time to go through all of those, but we will point out a few of them.

In Chapter 4 of Ephesians, starting in verse 4, Paul writes, "There is one body." What body is this? It is the Body of Christ. Then in verse 5 he says, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." But wait a minute, I just said there were as many as twelve baptisms! There are, but there is only one that pertains to the One Body. So while we can find many different baptisms in the Bible, there is really only one that we need to concern ourselves with as far as salvation. That is this one baptism. Which one is it?

If baptism is really as important as the Bible says, and it is important, and if there is only one for this dispensation, don't you think it's worth our time to find out which one it is? Don't you think we ought to know which baptism saves us today?

The *first* fact of baptism is that baptism does not always include water. We see that in Matthew 3 there are *three* baptisms all in one verse! Matthew 3:11 - "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." One of these baptisms is with water and two of them are dry. Three baptisms: water - John's baptism, the Holy Ghost and fire. John's baptism, according to this verse, was a baptism of repentance. Mark 1:4 explains John's baptism: "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." There was a time when water baptism was a part of God's plan for forgiving sin. You notice that it doesn't say that it was just for a testimony, which many teach today. It was for the remission of sin.

How did baptism forgive their sins? We know that baptism itself didn't forgive their sins, but it was an act of faith. God said to the people in that day, "be baptized," and if they believed God, they did it. When they obeyed that command,' was evident that they believed. That's the sense in which: forgave their sins. The *second* baptism is the Holy Spirit baptism. There is no water involved in this one. There at also two kinds of spiritual baptism spoken of in Scripture. The one spoken of in Matthew is not the spiritual baptism that we believe in today - the one baptism. This was the baptism that the Spirit, or actually Christ with the Spirit performed back in the day of Pentecost. That enabled the believers at that time to do marvelous things. They could speak in other languages, they could lay hands on the sick and they would recover, and they could even raise the dead. That was what baptism involved then. It was a baptism of power. Our baptism is a different one, which we'll see later.

The *third* baptism is with fire. What is that baptism all about? The next verse tells us, "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." This fire baptism is a baptism of judgment, when Christ pours out His judgment on unbelievers. All of this shows us that baptism does not always include water.

The *second* fact we want to notice is that baptism in Scripture basically means to "identify." What does “identify” mean? It means to connect, associate, or involve closely. When you identify with something, you closely associate with it, you are closely connected with it.

I Corinthians 10:1-2 - "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." It says that the Israelites were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, but did the Israelites get wet in the sea? No, they're the ones who stayed dry. It was the Egyptians who got wet, but it doesn't say they were baptized, does it? It was the Israelites who were baptized. You see, the basic meaning of baptize is not "to get wet," it is "to identify" with something. Here we see the Israelites identifying with something or becoming closely associated with Moses. They were baptized unto Moses even though they didn’t get wet. The Israelites participated in the same thing that Moses participated in.

What about Christ? Wasn't He baptized with water? Yes, He was. He was baptized more than once. In Matthew 3:13-14 - "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" Why did John question him? The reason was because John knew what his baptism was for: it was for the remission of sins. Did Christ need to have His sins forgiven? No, He didn’t have any sins. John understood that. That's why he asked, "Why are you coming to me? I'm the one who should need this. I'm the one who's sinful." But notice Christ's answer in verse 15, "And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." What does He mean by that? When the Lord Jesus Christ came to earth, we are told in the Book of Galatians, "Christ was made of a woman under the Law." When Christ came, He came to do what everybody under the Law was supposed to do. Baptism was one of those things.

In Matthew 5:17, He says just that, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." When Christ said to John, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness," He meant, "I have come to fulfill the Law as a human being." He was going to submit Himself just as everyone else who was under the Law.

What about us? Are we under the Law? No, Paul says we're not under the Law, we are under Grace. So for those who say we should be baptized with water because Christ was baptized, we can answer that we are living under a different dispensation. We're not living at the time when baptism was required. Christ was, so, of course, He did what they did under the Law. He was circumcised on the eighth day at the Temple like they were under the Law. He did things as He was supposed to at that time.

But Christ was baptized a second time and this baptism is much more significant. The context in Luke 12:50 takes place some three years after Christ was baptized with water. So as He speaks these words, He has already been baptized once. "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Which baptism is talking about here? He's talking about His baptism unto death. Remember the meaning of the word "baptize," to identify. When you are baptized with water, you identify with water. You get wet. But what happens when you identify with death? You die.

Mark 10 describes His coming suffering unto death. Two of the disciples asked if they could sit on Christ's right hand and left hand in glory, in His Kingdom. He asks them a question in verse 38 - "But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" He's not talking about water baptism here, He's talking about His baptism of suffering and death. If you want to sit next to me and reign on my right and left hand, you have to be willing to suffer for me. That's a principle that transcends the ages. Paul also said, "If we suffer with Him, we will reign with Him."

Christ's second baptism is His baptism unto death. Which of those two baptisms do most religious people identify with? His water baptism. How tragic, because in order to be saved today, we are supposed to identify not with His first baptism, but with His second baptism. That's what Paul talks about when he says being baptized into Christ.

The one baptism in this dispensation joins us to the Body of Christ. I Corinthians 12:13 - "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Some people say that because you are drinking, there has to be water someplace. But when you drink, something happens inside. So whatever baptism he's talking about, it happens on the inside, not on the outside!

Sometimes it's just as important to see what a passage does not say, as it is to see what a passage does say. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized." Does it say by one clergyman? Not in my Bible. Does it say by one priest, by one preacher? No! "For by one Spirit!" It's talking about a supernatural baptism, not about one performed by man. Then it says, "are we all baptized." It doesn't say just some of us. When you talk about water baptism, only some Christians are baptized. But

when you talk about the one baptism for today, everyone who is a believer has already had it. What are we identified with? "Into one body" - The Body of Christ.

What happens when we are identified with Christ? The *second* result of our baptism is in Romans 6:1-2 - "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" How did we become dead to sin?

Paul answers in verses 3 & 4 - "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death*?"* Christ did three things on our behalf, according to the gospel. He died, was buried and rose again. When we become identified with Christ, we participate in everything He participated in.

The *first* thing is His death. Why is that so important? The wages of sin is death. If you sin, you must die because of that sin. Even if you could go through life and not commit a single sin, Paul says we're sinners because we are related to Adam. You can't change who your parents are. You have your own sin *and* Adam's sin.

God offers us a choice: either you accept the fact that Christ's death is sufficient to pay for your sins, you either believe that or you don't, or you say you are going to try on your own to be saved. What happens if you do that? The wages of sin is death. If you want to pay for your sins, fine; just remember, you're going to do it forever in the Lake of Fire. If you want to pay for your own sins, God lets you try. It would take you forever to do it. But God says Christ has already paid for your sins. When we trust Him, what happens? We are identified with His death. His death becomes ours. It's as though we have already died. And if you have already died, the penalty has been paid! You don't need to pay the penalty for your sins anymore once you've trusted Christ. That's why it's so important to be identified with Christ.

The *second* thing in verse 4 is, "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death." Because we have been identified with His death, we are also identified with His burial (notice it doesn't say we are buried in water, but in His death). Those who read into this passage some ceremonial burial in water, rob the saints of one of the most blessed truths of the Word of God. That truth is that we are already identified with the work of Christ.

The third thing we see in verse 4 is, "That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." We've died with Him, if we are identified with Christ through spiritual baptism, we've been buried with Him, and Paul says we've also been raised with Him. Now we're able to walk in newness of life. In short, our spiritual baptism into Christ identifies us with the finished work of Christ: His death, His burial, His resurrection. That's what the one baptism will do for you. You can be water

baptized until you drown and you're not going to get that. You have to be identified with Christ, not with water.

So what's wrong with adding water baptism to picture what has happened, to show in some outward, visual way that you have identified with Christ's death? Or maybe the church requires it for church membership. Or maybe the relatives are pressuring you. If we really believe in our spiritual baptism into Christ which happens automatically when you trust Christ, then we have to seriously question why we should do anything else. Ephesians 1:6 - "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved." Christ let us become a member of His Body, the true Church, the invisible Church by simple faith. He accepts us on that basis. Yet some churches won't accept you as a member unless you have been water baptized. Does that make sense to you? Christ will accept you, but they won't.

A *second* consideration is in Colossians 2:9 - "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Christ is God, He is the fulness of God. Does verse 10 say, "And ye are complete - if only you will get baptized with water?" No! It says, "Ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power." Consider the ramifications of water baptism. When a priest or preacher says you need to be baptized with water, what does this suggest about the work of Christ? Did Christ really finish the work of salvation? Do we really believe it's done? If it's done, why do we need something else? If it's done, you don't need anything else. You've got it! That's all you're going to get!

Some will say, but we don't preach that baptism saves, it's just part of our tradition. Colossians 2:8 - "Beware lest man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." The simple fact is that Scripture always associates water baptism with the remission of sins. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that water baptism is to be an outward show of your relationship with Christ or what you've done. It's never said to be a testimony. It's simply presented as that which brings the remission of sin. Of course, that was back in a previous dispensation. It doesn't bring remission of sin anymore. It's only a tradition based on a wrong interpretation of Romans 6.

If we have trusted Christ alone for our salvation, we believe that gospel message that when Christ died, He was dying for my sins. When He was buried and rose again, He did it on my behalf. That is sufficient. God will accept me on that basis. He's only asking me to believe it. If we really believe that, then we're already baptized. What a beautiful thought. It's already taken place, nothing to add. It's complete.

Have you been baptized? You're not really saved unless you've been Spirit baptized. This isn't something you see or feel or that anyone else can give to you through the laying on of hands. It's something God does in your spirit the moment

you believe. Ephesians 1:12-14 - "That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." So not only are you sealed, you are saved the moment you believe. You are sealed unto the day of redemption. When you are saved, you are saved for good. That cannot be changed. God accepts you as you come in simple faith. Christ's work is a finished work and nothing can alter that.

Study Questions:

1. In what way is our relationship with Christ unique in this Dispensation of Grace?

2. Although the Bible mentions as many as twelve baptisms, how many apply today? (Eph. 4:5)

3. Does baptism always involve water? Explain Matthew 3:11.

4. What is the basic, Scriptural meaning of baptism, and how does I Corinthians 10:2 illustrate this?

5. Why was Christ baptized with water? (Matt. 3:13-15)

6. What other baptism was Christ baptized with? (Luke 12:50)

7. List and explain two results of our baptism into Christ:
   I Cor. 12:13 –
   Rom. 6:3-4 –

CHAPTER TEN

THE DISCIPLES' PRAYER

"Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name" (Matthew 6:9).

Every Sunday, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of church-goers will recite the words of this Scripture text. Most know it simply as the Lord's prayer. For many, it's the only Scripture that they can quote from memory. The good news is that at least these church-goers can quote some Scripture. I suppose that's better than none at all. But the bad news is that the vast majority of them don't have the slightest idea of what the words that they are reciting even mean. Indeed, if they did know what these words meant, they probably wouldn't be reciting them. They would understand where they really fit in God's program. Besides that, right here in this context, Christ gave some instructions which are actually violated if a person simply recites these words week after week.

Matthew 6:5 - "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the comers of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." And yet, how many people attend church not because they have a deep desire to learn more about the Lord and worship Him, but to be seen of men. Certainly that's not true of everyone, but many today come to church week after week because it is expected. They want to fit into high society and some segments of high society think it chic to go to church. However, that's not the reason to do so!

Verse 6 says, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." That's not to say that all public praying is wrong. But for some people reciting the so-called "Lord's Prayer" week after week is about all the praying they do. They don’t pray at all in private.

In verse 7 it says, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." Sad to say, when the "Lord's Prayer" is prayed week after week, for those who have no understanding of what it means, it's nothing but vain or empty repetition. In heathen cultures even today, they believe that if a prayer is uttered long enough and often enough, then it will have a greater impact. In certain eastern religions, they have prayer wheels. They write their prayer out on a little piece of paper, tuck it into a little crack, give it a spin with the hope that every time it reaches the top, it will be sent off. That way they can be praying without even having to do

anything. They just keep that wheel spinning. They are hoping that because it was sent up so many times, that it will make a greater impact. It's unfortunate that they do not understand what the Lord was trying to teach in this passage.

We want to examine this prayer, line by line, and I trust, come to understand what it really means. First I want to point out three facts about this "prayer."

1) Even though we commonly call it the "Lord's Prayer," it could probably better be called the "Disciples' Prayer." In fact, that's why we've entitled this message the Disciples' Prayer. You see, this isn't a prayer that the Lord was praying. It was a prayer He was giving to His disciples to instruct them how to pray. The Lord's Prayer is found in John 17, when He was in the Garden. This was not one that He prayed. It was simply an example He was giving to His disciples.

2) Christ never intended for His disciples to repeat this prayer word for word over and over again. In fact, we have that explained for us in verse 9 - "After this manner therefore pray ye." The word "manner" literally means "in this way" or "like this." In other words, the Lord was saying, "This is how you should pray." But He wasn't necessarily saying they had to repeat the same words over and over again.

3) While it is a very beautiful prayer, it was never meant for people living in this dispensation. It was intended for people who were entering the Tribulation period, that great time of testing that will come upon the earth.

We will show that the Lord's Prayer makes much more sense in a Tribulation setting than it does in the Dispensation of Grace. Let us take it line by line:

"Our Father which art in Heaven." Today, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we enjoy a father-child relationship with our God. That's a very special relationship. But at the time this prayer was spoken and given to the disciples, Gentiles didn't have that relationship. At the time Christ gave these words, only the Israelites were considered the children of God. Remember the Gentile woman who came to Him? At first he wouldn't even speak to her, but when He saw her great faith and that she recognized her place of submission under the people of Israel at that time, then He did answer her request. But notice the statement Christ made in Matthew 15:26 - "But He answered and said, It is not meet (or fitting) to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." Who are the children there? They are the children of Israel. They had a relationship with God. He was their Father. But what about the Gentiles at that time? Were they considered children? No, in fact, the Lord said it was not right to give it to the dogs. He was not trying to insult her, He was simply saying it like it was. The Gentiles weren't considered children of God.

So at the time that this prayer was given, to pray "Our Father" meant that you recognized (if you were an Israelite) that you had a covenant relationship with

God. That's the only basis by which they could say "Our Father." All the way through the Old Testament, God said time and time again, "I will be a father unto you, you will be my children." Now as the Lord teaches His disciples to pray, He says to pray "Our Father," recognizing that covenant relationship.

"Which art in Heaven" suggests a distance. Today we realize that God is still in Heaven, but we have such a close relationship as members of the Body of Christ, that God indwells us through the Holy Spirit, which is not something everyone had at that time.

"Hallowed be thy name." Hallowed means "holy." The point Christ is making here is that the name of God is very important in God's program for Israel. The Israelites' responsibility was to make God's name known to the Gentiles. You would be amazed at how many other Scriptures correspond to this prayer from the Prophetic program, the Old Testament or other Scriptures that relate to Israel. An example is in Ezekiel 36:19-23 - "And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries; according to their way and according to their doings I judged them. And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of His land. But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes." So time after time, God says "you profaned my holy name." Now that Israel has been regathered by the time of Christ and He is ministering to the disciples, He is saying pray, "hallowed be thy name." Get back to the program, do what you were supposed to be doing and make God's name holy amongst those with whom you come into contact.

Malachi 1:11 makes a similar statement, "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts." Their responsibility was to make God's name known and to make it a holy or a hallowed name. That fits in with what He says in this prayer. So to the Tribulation Jew, he is understanding his responsibility.

"Thy kingdom come." Believe me, this will be a very real prayer during the Tribulation period. During this time the Israelites will be under great persecution from the Antichrist. He will be putting them to death for their faith in the Lord Jesus. They're going to be praying, "try Kingdom come." Why? Because their only hope of deliverance at that time is the coming of Christ and setting up of His

kingdom. The next event after the Tribulation period is the Millennial Kingdom when Christ Himself reigns and rules over the earth. That is what will deliver them from the oppression that they will be experiencing. We don't pray that today. We're not waiting for a kingdom. We're waiting for the Rapture and we're looking forward to the time when the Lord Jesus Christ catches us off this earth. But they are looking forward to the time when Christ returns to the earth and sets up His throne in Jerusalem.

Don't they realize that the Tribulation period is seven years long? It has to run its course, doesn't it? How could praying "thy Kingdom come" do even them any good? Well, I believe we have some insight into that in Matthew 24:21-22. Matthew 24 deals with the Tribulation period. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." I'm not sure how those days will be shortened. Some suggest that the Tribulation won't last all seven years. I believe it will. I think what it really means is that those days will be speeded up somehow so they won't take so long for each day to get by. Will it make any difference for the Tribulation saints to pray "thy Kingdom come"? I believe this is the answer to their prayer - those days will be shortened! Otherwise, no flesh would be saved.

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven." Here is a divine definition of the Millennial Kingdom. It is when God's will is carried out in earth to the same degree that it is carried out in Heaven. This will be a kingdom on earth. The Jews have an earthly hope. They are not looking forward to going into Heaven, as we are. We are the heavenly people of God, the Body of Christ. They are looking for a kingdom on earth.

There is something here that has bothered me. Isn't Heaven today slightly defiled? Satan still has access to Heaven. Did you know that even at this moment, Satan can come and go in that heavenly realm, his fallen angels as well? Can we say that God's will is being totally done in Heaven, if Satan still has access to that place? I never reconciled that until it dawned on me that this prayer is designed not for the first half of the Tribulation, it's designed for the second half of the Tribulation. Something very significant happens halfway through the Tribulation period. Revelation 12:6-10 - "And the woman fled into the wilderness (the woman is Israel), where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. (Prophetic years are 360 days, so this is 3-1/2 years.) And there was war in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in Heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in Heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power

of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night."

Do you know what that verse is saying? It is saying that at that point, God's will is being done in Heaven totally. Satan will have been kicked out. It is at that point that the Tribulation saints will be praying "thy will be done in earth, just like it's been done in Heaven," because when the King comes on the earth, what will happen to Satan? The same thing that just happened to him in Heaven - he will be cast out. This is a prayer for the second half of the Tribulation period.

"Give us this day our daily bread" Something else happens halfway through the Tribulation period that's very significant. Revelation 13:1 - "And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, upon his heads the name of blasphemy." Here is a description of the Antichrist halfway through the Tribulation period. Verse 5 says, "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months." How long is that? Three and a half years. The same period of time.

What's going to happen at that time? Verse 16 says," he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." If you can't buy or sell, you're going to get hungry sooner or later, and you're not going to be able to buy food. It is at that time when the so-called Lord's Prayer comes effect. "Give us this day our daily bread." At this halfway point in the Tribulation, they are unable to get food. Will God answer their prayer? Revelation 12:6 - "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days."

What are they going to eat out there? Revelation 2:17 – “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." This is what God will provide to Israel when she flees to the wilderness to be fed there. Why does God have to do this? Because they can't buy or sell anymore if they are going to refuse that mark. If they did take the mark, they would end up in the Lake of Fire.

How many of us today need to pray this prayer? I'm not suggesting that there is not hunger today, but how many of us need to really pray that prayer? Most of us have a freezer full of food. We should thank God and praise the Lord that He has provided so abundantly, but most of us don't really need to pray, "Lord, give us this day our daily bread."

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." I can almost guarantee you that if those who recite this statement week after week really knew what it meant, they'd never say it again. What it's really saying is, "Forgive us, forgive our debts,

the same way that we forgive others." Or, "to the extent that we forgive people, Lord, you forgive us to that extent." I'm glad that I haven't always been forgiven to the extent that I have forgiven others. How about you? I'd be in pretty bad shape because I don't always forgive too well. In fact, in verses 14 and 15, he says it even more clearly, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." That is Law, not Grace. Today, we're not forgiven on the basis of whether we've forgiven people. We're forgiven on the basis of the shed blood of Christ, the finished work of Christ. We've believed in it, we're saved, and we're forgiven. Ephesians 4:32 says, "And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Today we forgive men, not to gain forgiveness, but as a show of our appreciation of the forgiveness we already have. There's a big difference.

"And lead us not into temptation." Before we show how this applies to the Tribulation saints, we must explain something about the word "temptation." The Word of God tells us in James 1:13 that God does not tempt us with evil. Some find a contradiction here because it says, "lead us not into temptation." God does not tempt us, but the temptation talked about in the Disciples' prayer is not a temptation to sin. The word for "temptation" has the idea of testing or trying someone. God does indeed test men. The temptation he's talking about here is the testing during the Tribulation period. Revelation 3:10 - "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." That is a reference to the Tribulation period. There will be provided for those who are faithful, a way of escaping the very heat of the Tribulation period. This verse is not suggesting that the Israelites will not have to go through the Tribulation period. They will. They'll be there. But, as in Matthew 24, he said, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation...flee into the mountains," get out to the hills of Judea. If they obey God and get out, He will protect them, to a degree, from the very heat of the Tribulation period.

"But deliver us from evil." In the original, we find a definite article. He's saying "deliver us from *the* evil." He's thinking of something in particular and some have even translated it "deliver us from the evil one." Most likely, He's referring to the Antichrist. There is certainly much evil today; in fact, the Apostle Paul calls this age a present evil age. We don't deny that it is an evil time. But believe me, the believer of this dispensation "ain't seen nothin' yet." It's going to get much more evil.

We can thank God we don't have to pray that prayer. We'll be delivered from the evil one. We will depart in the Rapture before the tribulation comes. So that's one prayer we don't have to pray.

And then finally, *"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever."* This final statement appears to be looking beyond the Millennial Kingdom,

all the way to the eternal kingdom. You have to remember that after the seven-year Tribulation period, God sets up his Kingdom through Christ for a thousand years. At the end of the thousand years, Scripture says there is a little season when Satan is released and then finally, the Great White Throne Judgment, the eternal state, the new heavens and the new earth. That goes on forever and ever.

I believe this part of the prayer, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever" goes on beyond the Millennial Kingdom, the thousand-year reign, all the way to the eternal kingdom. Remember who is being addressed in this prayer, "Our Father." In I Corinthians 15:24 - "Then cometh the end, when He (Christ) shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power." That's what Christ is going to do for that thousand years. He's going to rule with a rod of iron. He's going to put down all rule and authority and power.

Then in verse 25 - "For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith, All things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." At the end of the Millennium, Christ turns the kingdom over to the Father. It's not that the Father is any greater or higher than Christ, they are both God. He does it because even within the Godhead, there are channels of authority. Ultimately, God the Father, is the executive officer in the Godhead. So at the end of the Millennium, Christ takes the Kingdom, hands it over to the Father and that's what this looks forward to. "For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

King David recognized this when he was reigning as king of Israel. I Chronicles 29:10-11 - "Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all." You see, that principle has been there all along. Someday, God the Father, will rule over everything. He does today in a sense, but in that day, ALL those enemies will be put aside and He will have complete, full control.

That is the true meaning of the Disciples' Prayer. When put into the context, it's very meaningful, a very beautiful prayer. But let's not be those who would repeat things in vain repetition. Let's not be those who would deal with any Scripture in that way. Let's search the Scriptures so that we might know what is being taught.

Study Questions:

1. How do those who recite the so-called “Lord’s Prayer” actually violate His very instructions?

2. Did Christ intend for this prayer to be recited word for word?

3. For what people was this prayer give as a pattern?

4. Explain the true meaning of each line of this prayer:

    a) Our Father which art in Heaven…
    b) Hallowed be thy name…
    c) Thy kingdom come…
    d) Thy will be done in earth as it is in Heaven…
    e) Give us this day our daily bread…
    f) And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors…
    g) And lead us not into temptation…
    h) But deliver us from evil…
    i) For thin is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE GREAT COMMISSION
Part I

> *“And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14).*

Ever since the fall of man back in the Garden of Eden some 6000 years ago, our gracious, loving Father has sought by various means to win back mankind to Himself. That's really the message of the Word of God. It's simply a record of God's various methods and various ways of reaching out to man, showing man that God does indeed love him and wants to draw man unto Himself. At different times, God has used different methods of trying to reach the human race. There are times when He has done this through direct intervention, and there are other times when He has used human instrumentality. When our first parents sinned back in the Garden, God Himself called out, "Adam! Where are you?" God was the first missionary. He was the first one who reached down and attempted to reach mankind.

Four-thousand years later, the Son of God came to seek and to save that which was lost. There are those times when God has taken it upon Himself directly to intervene to reach man. But throughout the course of history, God has normally chosen human means, human instrumentality to carry out His work on the earth.

That's what this message is all about. We are going to study about commissions as we find them in the Scriptures. It would be fitting to understand what a commission is to begin with*. First* of all, let's notice that a commission is when you assign someone to a task. Generally, the word commission contains a little bit more than that. Not only are you assigning someone to do a certain job, you are also authorizing them to act on your behalf. So when we talk about a commission, we are talking about the fact that God from time to time has assigned redeemed human beings the task of reaching others for salvation and has authorized them to carry out this responsibility. We speak of commissioning pastors, and indeed, there are times when a church will recognize a man's gifts and talents and abilities for the Lord, and will send him out and commission him to act on behalf of that church or on behalf of the Lord. We commission missionaries and we commission military men for different responsibilities.

Quite often in Christianity, we will hear preachers speak of the Great Commission. Generally, when they say that, they are referring to the words of our

Lord that we find recorded at the end of each of the Gospel records and in the first chapter of Acts, when the Lord, before He ascended, gave instructions to His Twelve Apostles. (There were only eleven at that point, but Judas was shortly replaced by Matthias, bringing the number once again to twelve.) That is generally thought of as the "Great Commission." Many a message has been preached, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel. Lo, I am with you always." Yet many of these messages, indeed most of these messages, leave out the bulk of what we find in the so-called Great Commission.

What we want to do is show from Scripture that not only is the "Great Commission" not the commission that God has given to us in this dispensation, but also that those who claim to be carrying out the Great Commission do not do half of the things found in those instructions. We will show you from Scripture why they do not do those and why they really cannot do some of those things anymore.

Before we proceed any further, we have to explain something. The Grace Movement has long been accused of not being "missions minded." Where we are guilty of that, we need to be reprimanded.

I am sure there are churches that are not concerned about missions. But usually this accusation comes not from that perspective but from the perspective of the Great Commission. We (the Grace Movement) have spent so much time emphasizing that we are not under the so-called Great Commission, that people get the idea that we think we're not under any commission. We want to very clearly point out at the outset, that we're not saying that at all. We're not saying that we don't have a job to do for the Lord in this dispensation. We're simply saying that it's a different job than the job He gave to the Twelve Apostles. Don't get confused in your mind when we say we're not under the Great Commission We are under some orders, some instructions from the Lord.

We'll be looking at the commissions found in Matthew Mark, Luke, John and in Acts. But before we do that, we need to realize that God has given other commissions it Scripture, even before we come to the Four Gospels. *First* of all, Noah is one of the earliest examples of God commissioning man. We realize that Adam was given a job. Adam and Eve were supposed to go and multiply and subdue the earth. In a sense, that is a commission. But we're thinking more in terms of reaching fallen man at this point, reaching them with a message.

Noah was commissioned to build an ark. We are told in I Peter that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. That at least suggests that during the time he was building the ark, which took him 120 years, he did spend time preaching. I can hardly believe that God did not at least offer to the human race the opportunity to get in the ark if they would have wanted to go along. We know how the story turned out, don't we? We know that only his three sons and their families were the ones who came along in the ark. We say praise the Lord that he at least had

his family with him. That certainly was his most important responsibility. But it teaches us a principle. The principle is this: Success is not measured by the number of converts that you have, it's measured by your faithfulness to the revealed will of God.

Our society is numbers oriented. Let's see who can get the most people gathered around. We do want to see many people come to see the truth and know the Lord, but our success will not be measured on those terms. Our success will be measured by whether we maintained a faithfulness to the revealed will of God. In Noah's day it meant being faithful to the message God gave to him. That involved building an ark. But that's not the message we're under today. Today we are faithful when we maintain fidelity and truthfulness in terms of the Pauline revelation, the message God gave to us today through the Apostle Paul. This is where true success is.

A second example is Abraham. He also was commissioned. He really is one of the great men of faith that we find in Scripture. He's called the Father of Faith. God gave to him a commission, one of the greatest commissions that He ever gave. It was that his family, his seed would become a great nation and that in his seed, all the other nations would be blessed. That's a pretty great commission! We have to remember that the responsibility of the nation of Israel, going all the way back to Abraham, was to minister to all the other people of the earth by being a testimony through obeying the Word of God, therefore being blessed and pointing other nations to the true God. That was indeed a great commission.

Then, a *third* commission is the Old Testament prophets. They had a unique commission. We need to understand their job because it will help us understand what is happening when we come to the Four Gospels. The prophet's job was not usually to go out and win the world, or to reach the nations. There were prophets who did prophesy to the nations, but their primary responsibility was to prophesy to the people of Israel, and to get them to repent so that they could become the missionaries they were supposed to be. If Israel wasn't being faithful, how could they win other nations to the Lord? So the Old Testament prophets were commissioned to reach Israel.

That brings us to a very important Old Testament prophet. You might not have thought of him as an Old Testament prophet, but his name is John - John the Baptist. John was indeed a prophet and was, in the words of Christ, the greatest of the prophets. Matthew 11:11 - "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he, that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he."

John the Baptist's responsibility is found in Luke 1:13. The Old Testament prophet was to turn Israel back to God. When you come to the time of Christ, what condition was Israel in spiritually? Christ said Israel was good on the outside, like a white sepulcher. A sepulcher was a tomb, a grave. They were all

clean and white on the outside, but inside they were full of dead men's bones. Israel had reformed herself but had not been transformed by the Lord. They weren't in any condition to bring other nations to the Lord. Therefore, God sent John unto them.

In Luke 1:13, we read, "But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zechariah: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God."

Right there we're told that John's ministry was to turn Israel back to God. Why? Because they were supposed to be reaching the nations. When John came baptizing, it was to turn Israel back to God. In John 1:31, concerning Christ, "And I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water." John's baptism was a baptism that had to do with Israel, manifesting Christ to Israel because Israel needed to be turned around to God so that they could reach the nations.

With this background, we're going to see Christ's first commission to His Disciples. Contrary to what a lot of people teach, it's not found in Matthew 28. His first commission was found in Matthew 10:5-10. We're going to see several basic elements in this commission to His Disciples. We're going to find that Christ's Disciples, when they were first sent out, were sent out with a ministry like unto the ministry of the Old Testament prophet, and like unto the ministry of John the Baptist. What was that? To turn Israel back to God. Notice in verse 5 - "These Twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

Now I want to point out several things that they are told here. *First* of all, they are told to avoid the Gentiles. That might seem contradictory. Christ came to save the world, didn't he? Yes! Then why avoid the Gentiles? Because Christ came under the authority of God and according to the program of God, and at that time, God's program was to reach the nations through Israel. So in keeping with that, Christ instructed His Disciples to go not into the way of the Gentiles.

The *second* basic element was that He told them to go to Israel only - "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." That term "lost sheep" seems contradictory. We usually think of sheep in the Word of God as a believer, one who is a follower of the Lord. But you see, Israel and only Israel could be lost sheep. They were related to God through covenant relationship, but they were still lost because they were in unbelief, therefore, the Israelites were lost sheep.

The *third* element was to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of Heaven refers to Christ's earthly kingdom that will come some day. It has been delayed now because of God's intervention. Notice He doesn't say, "Go preach the Gospel of the Grace of God." That wasn't revealed yet. That wasn't to be revealed until the Apostle Paul was called into God's service.

The *fourth* element is miraculous gifts. Verse 8 - "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat." They were to practice Kingdom living: to take no thought for tomorrow. The Lord had promised to supply all their needs in the Kingdom. He is saying to prove it by the way you go out and minister. If you are going to be a missionary today, I would strongly recommend that you do not go out without any provision. God has designed a different way for missions today. We are not under the Kingdom program today. You are to be supported by the churches. At this point, many would say that they understand that Matthew 10 is not our commission. They understand that God superseded that with another commission. They would say that it is the one we find in Matthew 28. But we're going to see that Matthew 28 is not a replacement for Matthew 10; it is simply an expansion of Matthew 10. It's really still the same commission. But what's the difference?

The difference is that in Matthew 10, the instructions are given to the Disciples for the purpose of reaching Israel with the Kingdom gospel. But in Matthew 28, the instructions are assuming that they are going to be successful with that first ministry. And as they reach Israel, it simply goes beyond the borders of Israel and expands to all nations, but with the same message. It's still going to be the Gospel of the Kingdom. It's still going to include many of these same elements.

It's very important to understand that this is not the full picture. Here's a mistake many make - they turn to Matthew 28 and say this is the Great Commission. But they don't even think to look in Mark 16 or Luke 24 or John 20 or Acts 1. And yet, those all record parallel passages giving the same commission but from the different author's perspective, and each includes a different element that the Lord gives. We have to look at all of them to get the full picture.

In Matthew 28, we will see two basic items. In verse 19, He says, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." We'll consider that as we look at verse 20, when He says "teaching them." But the *first* thing we want to point out in Matthew 28 is that He instructs the Disciples to baptize all nations. In verse 19 - "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them.... "Here's a point that is not often brought out. When John came baptizing, he came to baptize Israel. Why? Because God had told the Israelites way back in Exodus that if they would turn to the Lord and keep His commandments, they would be a holy nation and a

kingdom of priests. In order to be a priest according to the Law, you had to be baptized, you had to be washed with water. It was a ritual, a ceremony and part of the priesthood.

As John came, he baptized Israel so that they could be a kingdom of priests. But now, as the Disciples reach Israel, which is the desire the Lord had in mind, they are to go out and baptize all nations. Why? Are they going to become a kingdom of priests, too? I don't believe so. I think there is a different reason for the baptizing of the nations.

We need some background to understand the purpose of baptizing all nations. One of the Old Testament ordinances was the ordinance of the red heifer. It was an ordinance of cleansing. It was designed to cleanse the unclean. Normally, that would have been carried out in Israel. When an Israelite touched a dead body, they were unclean; they needed to be cleansed. When they became a leper, they were unclean and needed to be cleansed. To the Israelite, even a Gentile who had not touched a dead body, and might have been as pure as can be, was considered by the Israelites to be unclean. In fact, Peter points that out later in Acts 10. The Gentiles were considered unclean. They needed to be cleansed. They needed to be ceremonially washed or baptized. In Isaiah 52:13, it says, "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astounded at thee; His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men: So shall He sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at Him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider."

He shall sprinkle many nations. There you have the baptizing of the many nations. That's what the Apostles were to carry out. It had to do with cleansing of the nations, those considered unclean. A comparison in Ezekiel 36 has a cleansing of the Israelites. In verse 24 - "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." Even under the Law there were several different washings or baptisms. Understanding this explains what is going on at the time of Christ and the Apostles. They are baptizing Israel, first through John, so that they can be a kingdom of priests; then, the sprinkling or baptizing of the nations; then, the cleansing of Israel. There are several different kinds of washings or baptizings going on.

Back in Matthew 28, He says, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." It's at this verse that most who follow or claim to follow the Great Commission, fall short. They do not teach their converts to observe all things that Christ commanded them. There are many instructions Christ gave while He was on earth that were never intended to be followed in this

dispensation. Yet, if you are going to obey the so-called Great Commission, you must teach all those things.

Matthew 23:1 - "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to His Disciples, Saying, The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do: but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." Here Christ told His Disciples - you listen to those who are sitting in Moses' seat of authority and you obey them. Why? Because they were still under the Law, That was still God's program at that time. As He sends them out in Matthew 28, He says, "Teach them to observe *all* things whatsoever I have commanded you." Yet many who teach the Great Commission for this age don't do that.

In Mark 16, we'll point out three major distinctive areas of instruction. Verse 15 - "And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." That sounds good. Indeed, that's what we're trying to do - preach the gospel to everyone. But the question we should ask is, "which gospel"? The *first* thing we see in this commission is that they were supposed to preach the gospel in all the world, but when you compare Scripture to Scripture, we know that they were supposed to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom. Mark 13:10 and Matthew 24:14 are parallel passages. In Matthew it says, "And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." That's talking about the Tribulation period, and the Kingdom Gospel.

In Mark 13, you don't have the statement "Gospel of the Kingdom," but you do in Matthew in the parallel passage. When Mark says, "Go preach the gospel" and yon ask, "which gospel?", you have to go back and look to see which gospel. It's still the Gospel of the Kingdom. It hasn't been replaced yet or superseded yet. They were still supposed to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom. That's not the gospel we preach today. We do not preach, "Repent and Christ will come back and set up a Kingdom." That's a different message.

The *second* thing in Mark is that baptism is connected to salvation. Look at Mark 16:16 - "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Many who claim the Great Commission would like this to read like this, "He that believeth and is saved should be baptized." But that's not the way it reads. It plainly connects baptism and salvation in this verse. Many try to get around this by saying that the last part of the verse says that he that believeth not shall be damned, it doesn't say he that is not baptized shall be damned. But does this change the first part of the verse? Not at all. The first part still says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The Lord didn't have to say in the second part, "and is not baptized," because if a person didn't believe, what chance would there be of him going to be baptized? He probably wouldn't do it anyway. Here, Christ connects baptism with salvation.

A third element is miraculous signs. Verse 17 - "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Here's where the Pentecostals have a heyday. Look at all the things it says there. Are we to be doing those? Yet, ironically, many of those who claim to be following the Great Commission, would agree with us that these signs are not a part of this dispensation. But you have to be a bit inconsistent to say that without rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

Why were there miraculous signs? What did Paul say about the Jews? The Jews require a sign. What did these things signify? How would casting out devils or demons be a sign to the world of what is going on? What was going on? They were preaching the Kingdom. How would casting out demons be a sign of the Kingdom? Revelation 20:1-3 says, "And I saw an angel come down from Heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season." One of the characteristics of the Kingdom is that Satan will be cast out.

Can you see how casting out demons would be a sign of the Kingdom? Definitely! The Twelve Apostles were given the credentials of the Kingdom in that they were able to cast out demons just like God will cast out Satan when Christ sets up His Kingdom.

The *second* thing is that they shall speak with new tongues. How would that be a sign to the Israelites of the Kingdom? Zephaniah 3:8-9 - "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy." That will happen at the end of the Tribulation period. He will gather those nations. "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent."

One of the characteristics of the Kingdom will be that God will give a common language, a pure language to the people so that all the people can speak the same language and understand. He did that in a limited way with the Apostles. He enabled them to speak the languages the people could understand to signify (remember it's a sign) the Kingdom.

The next sign in verse 18 - "They shall take up serpents." What would that signify about the Kingdom? In Isaiah 11, we are told some amazing things about the animal kingdom when Christ reigns. Isaiah 11:6 - "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young

lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them." In other words, the animal kingdom will become tamed and the lions and the wolves won't eat the flesh of lambs and goats anymore. "And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den." These are extremely poisonous snakes, but during the Kingdom, they will be harmless. How would being able to take up serpents signify the Kingdom? Obviously, it is a foretaste of what the Kingdom will be like. The Disciples were sent out with the Great Commission and they were given the ability to practice and live as though the Kingdom were here: Kingdom conditions.

Finally, it says, "If they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them, and they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." Another aspect of the Kingdom is that God has promised physical health under His covenant. Those who obey His covenant can enjoy perfect physical health. Therefore, they are given the credentials to prove that indeed they were authorized to proclaim the Kingdom. They were given the ability to heal. That is the Great Commission.

Study Questions:

1. What was Noah's Commission?
2. What was Abraham's Commission?
3. What was the commission of the Old Testament Prophets?
4. What was John the Baptist's Commission?
5. What are the basic elements of Christ's original commission to His Disciples?

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE GREAT COMMISSION
Part II

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

One of the first questions often asked when an individual comes to know Christ is the question - What do I do now that I am a Christian? The answer will vary from church to church, from preacher to preacher, but somewhere along the line many hear that they are to fulfill the Great Commission. We have already shown the commission that Christ gave to the Twelve Apostles was the Kingdom Commission. This was the commission that revolved around God's plan and program for the nation of Israel. Israel was a special nation, a Kingdom. Exodus 19:3 is one of God's earlier commissions dealing with Israel's responsibility. "And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests." What is the responsibility of a priest? A priest was a person who interceded on behalf of others. There are no priests upon the earth in this sense today, but a true priest in the Biblical sense is a person who is a mediator between the people and God. He would intercede on their behalf and represent those people.

In this passage we are told that Israel will be a Kingdom of priests; in other words, an entire nation of priests. Going on in verse 6 - "And ye shall be unto me a Kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel." The Apostle Peter, writing to the Israelites later in his epistle, says basically the same thing, "You are a holy nation. You are a royal priesthood." That was their responsibility. So God's plan was for Israel to go out to be priests to the world on behalf of God, and that the world could come to God through that nation.

When Christ gave His commission to the Disciples, His original commission was found in Matthew 10. The Lord limited the ministry of the Twelve Apostles to the nation of Israel. Why was that? Because at the time that the Lord came to earth,

Israel herself was in no condition to show others how to come to God. So before Israel could become a Kingdom of priests, she herself had to be cleansed and brought back to God. She had to repent and turn back to the covenant and back to the Lord. Therefore, as the Twelve Apostles are first sent out, they are sent to turn Israel back to her original position of privilege of being a Kingdom of priests. That's why He says in verse 5 - "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not, But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

This is what we're talking about when we say the Kingdom program. We're not using the word kingdom in the popular sense among many Christians who think of the Kingdom simply as the realm of belief. There is a sense in which we can say that, but when we come to the Four Gospels and it says the kingdom, it means the Kingdom that Christ will establish on the earth. It is talking about Israel's Kingdom as a Kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

As Israel was convened (although we know it didn't happen that way), it was God's intention that she be convened and come to God and be that Kingdom of priests. That is where the commission in Matthew 28 was to take effect. Again, Matthew 28 was not a replacement for Matthew 10. It simply was an expansion of the same program. They were to begin with their own people, Israel, and then go out onto all the world.

We must consider all five accounts of the Great Commission given not only in Matthew 28 and Mark 16, but also in Luke 24, John 20 and Acts 1:8. We must compile the whole thing to get a full picture. Many Christians do not do this. They only pick out one account and then they ignore the rest. You cannot do that if you are to be consistent. You must consider all five of the accounts.

John 20 is often overlooked. John 20:23 - "Whosoever sins ye remit (forgive), they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained." The key element of this account of the Great Commission is the authority to forgive sins. Can you see why most preachers and teachers of the Bible skip over that one? They don't know what to do with it. It looks like it is saying that the Disciples were given the authority to forgive sins. Surely, He couldn't have meant that, could He? Just as Pentecostalism emphasizes Mark's signs and miracles, Roman Catholicism emphasizes the John 20 account.

Lest you think I am picking on different groups or account of the Great Commission with the denominations, let me make a clarification. At this point, I am actually commending those groups because they are more honest with these passages than a lot of fundamentalists are. The Roman Catholic Church goes to John 20:23 and says this means just what it says. It says they will have the authority to forgive sins, therefore, we believe that. They take it for what it says. The problem is, that Scripture was not intended for this dispensation. That

Scripture applied to the nation of Israel and the Twelve Apostles as they ministered in Israel.

Back in Matthew, the Apostles were given a great responsibility. In Matthew 16: 19, Peter is told, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." Remember, that's not Heaven, it's the earthly reign of Christ. Peter is given authority to bind and to loose. That's talking about forgiveness of sins of people who have committed transgression in the Kingdom. Also, Matthew 19:28 - "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." In that position, they were given the authority to make a determination concerning the forgiveness of sins.

There is a key statement in John 20:21 - "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." When Christ was sent to earth, did He have the authority to forgive sins? Yes, he did. Another reference is in Matthew 9:1-8. This is the passage where Christ was about to heal the lame man and He said, "My son, your sins be forgiven thee." Remember, the religious leaders objected and said, "How can you forgive sins?" And Christ reminded them, "Is it easier to say rise up and walk or thy sins be forgiven thee?" Then He pointed out that He had been given authority to forgive sins. Now, as He sends His Disciples out, He says, "As my Father hath sent me, *so send I you."* But that's not part of our authority today. We do not have the authority to forgive someone else's sins. In fact, when we rightly divide the Word of Truth, we find out that there is not a human being on the face of the earth today that has the authority to forgive someone else's sins. There is not a preacher, a priest, or a pope who can forgive one sin. Paul tells us in I Timothy 2:5 - "There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." So we need to rightly divide the Word of Truth in order to understand John 20:23.

Let's compare Luke 24 and Acts 1. Luke was the human author of both of these books. Both books are addressed to a man named Theophilus, which means "a lover of God." In each of these you have two major elements to consider.

First of all, in Luke 24:49, we read, "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." The element we see here is that the Apostles are endued with miraculous power by the Holy Spirit. We see the same thing in Acts 1:8 - "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." This is the Spirit baptism that was predicted back in Acts 1:5 - "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." The

Twelve Apostles, as they were sent out with the Great Commission, the Kingdom program, were given the promise of the Holy Spirit and a baptism of power.

At this point, I briefly want to distinguish between the Spirit baptism that was received by the Twelve Apostles and the Spirit baptism we receive today. They are two different things, although many people confuse the two. We know from Ephesians 4:5, that there is only one baptism for the Body of Christ. But which baptism is it? Here's how we can distinguish. In Acts 2, Christ baptized the Disciples into the power of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, they had great power. John said, "There is one coming after me that is greater than me". He was referring to Christ.

But the baptism we have in I Corinthians 12:13 simply says, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." The difference there is that instead of Christ doing the baptizing, it is the Spirit doing the baptizing. And instead of being baptized into the power of the Holy Spirit, we are baptized into the person of Christ.

Some teach that we have both and that today God is still enduing us with miraculous powers. Don't misunderstand: God has certainly given us great spiritual power, but today the spiritual power is in the inward man, not in the outward man, as the Twelve Apostles had.

To give you a few examples of their great miraculous power, see Acts 2:3 - "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Part of this power baptism was the ability to speak in other languages.

Another example is Acts 3:6-7 - "Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength." There, the Apostles had the ability and power to heal.

Acts 5:12 is another example, "And by the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch)." They had the miraculous powers because of this spiritual baptism.

Are we to be doing these things today? If we are under the Great Commission yet, we should. But if we have been given a new commission, we would not expect these signs to continue. Indeed, this is the testimony of the Scriptures. As God began revealing a new message to the Apostle Paul, we see these miracles begin to drop off. They cease altogether as Paul's ministry comes into its own: the ministry of the Dispensation of the Grace of God.

The *second* feature we want to see in the Luke and Acts commission is the geographical order of ministry. This might seem like a small thing, but it is very significant. In Luke 24:47, Christ says, "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Notice in Acts 1:8, we see the same order, "And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

I realize that many spiritualize this teaching and this verse and say Jerusalem would be like their home town and Judea would be the surrounding county and Samaria would be the next region, etc. So to fulfill the Great Commission, they would say you should start right where you are and work your way out. Well, you may spiritualize what this says, but I can not. It says to begin in Jerusalem. If you are going to fulfill the Great Commission as it is recorded here, you would have to go to Jerusalem to begin.

Let me point out why he said to begin in Jerusalem and it will become clear. Remember what they were trying to do; they were trying to reach Israel first so that she could become a Kingdom of priests. How could Israel become a Kingdom of priests if the capital city didn't even believe? That's why Christ said, "begin in Jerusalem." After Jerusalem hears, then you go on, and after you reach the area of Judea, then you go on. That is exactly how the Apostles understood Christ's instructions.

Whenever you read Acts 1:8, also read Acts 8:1 - "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles." The Apostles understood that they were not to go out of Jerusalem until Jerusalem believed. They knew their job wasn't done there yet: Jerusalem had not received the message of the Kingdom. Christ had taught, "Let the children first be filled." "The children" is referring to Israel.

Some people have the idea that after Christ died and was buried and rose again, that He forgot about Israel and set aside the Kingdom Program at that time. But notice what Christ is teaching the Disciples after His Resurrection. Acts 1:3 - "To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." For a forty-day period, Christ spent His time instructing His Apostles in the Kingdom. Does that sound like He's going to do something else for awhile? No, and that's how they understood it, because look at the question they ask in verse 6 - "When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?" Why were they thinking that? Didn't God set Israel aside? Not yet. So they are asking, "Will it be restored now?" His answer is interesting. He doesn't give them

a yes and He doesn’t give them a no. He says, "It is not for you to know." He sort of pushed them off because it depended on whether Israel received the message or not. We now know that they didn't and that's why the Great Commission was interrupted.

There are some conclusions we can draw based on our study of the Great Commission so far. *First* of all, we need to be consistent in obeying God's instructions. As we've been pointing out, all five accounts of the Great Commission have to be taken together. Yet, I know of no group or denomination or religion that even claims to attempt to do all of the things found in all five of these commissions. Here's some interesting insight as to why you have so many divisions in Christianity. It is because some denominations take one portion of the Word of God that was intended for Israel, and some take a little different portion of the Word of God, and they pick and choose what they want to believe. It's all true for its respective time, but they are only taking a small portion of what God said. Yet, you have to take the entire Word of God into the picture and then you have to rightly divide.

Some would accuse us of picking and choosing, too. After all, we get up week after week and say we are rightly dividing the Word of Truth. But there's a difference between picking and choosing and rightly dividing. The difference is that when you pick and choose, you are simply looking at all of God's instructions and then taking the ones that you're comfortable with, or the ones that agree with your theology, or the ones that you already believed anyway.

But rightly dividing means, *first* of all, finding out which instructions God gave to us in this dispensation, and then obeying all of those instructions that are given to us. When you rightly divide, you are not just simply picking and choosing. When we determine what God wants us to obey, we had better get busy and do all of it, otherwise, we're being inconsistent, too. God's instructions for us are revealed through the Apostle Paul.

A second conclusion is that Paul did not labor under the so-called Great Commission. Paul was not working under the commission given to the Twelve Apostles. There are several things we want to point out. *First* of all, Paul is not one of the Twelve Apostles. If we could get that through the heads of all the denominations, we would be a long way towards solving the confusion that exists. It comes as a surprise for some people to learn that. But look at Matthew 10 and see if Paul's name appears as one of the Twelve Apostles.

The second thing is that Paul did not get his message from the Twelve Apostles. Some would say they know that Paul is not one of the Twelve Apostles, but he's like them. After all, he got his message from them, didn't he? But look in Galatians 1:11-12 - "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." And verse 15 - "But when it

pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me." Paul didn't go and find out what they were teaching. He got it straight from the Lord and he got a new message. He got the Dispensation of Grace, the Mystery.

The *third* element that shows Paul did not labor under the Great Commission is in I Corinthians 1:17. The Twelve Apostles were sent with specific instructions to baptize. But here Paul says, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Could Peter have said Christ sent him not to baptize? No!

But the objectors will say that Paul baptized. Why did Paul baptize if he wasn't sent to baptize. The answer is for the same reason that he spoke in tongues and healed the sick and circumcised Timothy and did a lot of other Jewish things. It was because he was emerging from a Jewish program. And as any good individual believer would do, you continue what you know to do until you find out otherwise. Paul knew to do these things until God told him otherwise.

A third conclusion is that the so-called Great Commission says nothing about the grace of God. If you are going to be consistent in preaching the commission given to the Twelve, then you can't go out and tell people Christ died for their sins, was buried and rose again. He didn't tell them to go out and preach that. They were supposed to go out and preach, "Repent, the Kingdom is coming. God is going to send Christ back and set up a Kingdom, the times of refreshing." Our commission today is different than the one given to the Apostles.

Granted, many read *into* the Great Commission the Gospel of Grace. Many say they are going to preach that Christ died, and rose again for our sins. But let's be consistent and draw the lines where God draws them, not where we want to.

What's the gospel for today? 1 Corinthians 15:l - "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel." What is the gospel? Verse 3 - "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received." He received it from Christ. And then he says, "how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." The Gospel of Grace is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

Those brought up under the Great Commission believe that, but they also believe that maybe they had better be baptized, too. But that's not God's way now. In Romans 4, it says, "To him that worketh not." The danger of continuing to proclaim the commission given to the Twelve Apostles is that it mixes Law with Grace. Sure, many preach that Christ died for our sins, but they mix in other works with it. Are you trusting in the finished work of Christ alone? If you believe that you have to be baptized to be saved, I'm sorry to have to tell you that was true at one time, but it's not true anymore. If you have been brought up to believe

that there's another human being on earth that can forgive your sins, I'm sorry but that is not true anymore. If you think your sins have been forgiven by doing some other things, why not simply come to Christ now on the basis of grace, believing that He died for your sins, was buried and rose again. Trust Him in that only, because that's how you get to heaven at this present time.

Study Questions:

1. Why did Christ originally commission the Twelve Disciples to go only to Israel (Matt. 10)?

2. Review some of the basic elements of the commissions found in…
   Matt. 28:18-20 –

   Mark 16:15-18 –

3. What is the key element of the commission in John 20:21-23?

4. List and explain two main elements found in the Luke 24:46-49 and Acts 1:8 accounts:

5. How did God inform Peter that a change was taking place?

6. What three conclusions can we draw based on our study of “The Great Commission”?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

OUR GRACE COMMISSION
Part I

> *"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth"* (I Timothy 2:3-4).

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and members of the Body of Christ, we are blessed with many great privileges. One of the greatest privileges is the privilege of serving God. Our God is the Lord of the universe. He created this marvelous universe which words cannot really describe. We are mere dots on one tiny planet in a rather small solar system in just one of many, many, many galaxies. Yet we think we're pretty big sometimes. If we've gained nothing else from the space program, we've perhaps gained a sense of our own size. When we consider the fact that God has chosen these little dots to be His servants, His representatives, that really puts a different perspective on life, doesn't it? God has chosen us to represent and demonstrate His grace to not only a lost and dying, fallen world, but even to angels. He has chosen us as messengers. What a shame that we don't take this privilege more seriously.

The so-called Great Commission given by the Lord to the Twelve Apostles is not our commission for today. Rather, these words were God's instructions to Israel as she was to be a light unto the world and the nations and to bring them into a relationship with God. But because of the unbelief of Israel, God has interrupted that program and has now replaced the commission given to the Twelve Apostles with a new commission, a new apostle, and a new message.

There is an important truth we must understand about what God expects us to be doing in this present day. I Timothy 2:3 - "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." Our Grace Commission involves two major responsibilities.

The *first* is, that all men be saved, and *secondly,* that all men come to the knowledge of the truth. In Ephesians 3, Paul says that all men might come to see the fellowship or the Dispensation of the Mystery. One part of our commission pertains to the lost or the unbeliever, to bring them to an understanding of salvation. The *second* part of our commission involves those who already may be

believers but still need to understand the Dispensation of the Mystery. Those two items make up our Grace Commission.

The first part of this commission is explained most clearly in II Corinthians 5. What motivates us to share the gospel with others and to show them the ministry of reconciliation? The Apostle Paul lists at least three things in this text. *The first* is in verse 14 - "For the love of Christ constraineth us." Notice it doesn't say our love for Christ. It's Christ's love that motivates us, not our love for Him. When we consider that the Lord Jesus Christ loved us enough to save us and His love is constant towards us, that should motivate us to share that love with someone else. Also, He loves the lost, the unbeliever. In Romans 5:8 - "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." He didn't wait around to see if we would believe or not. It was while we were yet sinners. The word "constraineth" means "to hold together." The idea that Paul is trying to get across here is that the love of Christ holds us to one task. He's going to be talking about that task of the ministry of reconciliation, so he's saying you have that on one hand - the task - and you have us - believers - on the other hand. The love of Christ holds those two things together. The sense of his statement is that the love of Christ confines you to one major purpose in life - to be involved in the ministry of reconciliation.

A second motivation is the death of Christ, in verse 14 -"Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." If Christ died for all the people, that means His death must be sufficient to cover everyone's sin. Potentially they could also be considered dead.

Let's explain that. One of the most sinister of all false doctrines is the teaching of limited atonement: that is, the teaching that Christ did not die for everyone, but only died for those who would eventually believe and be saved. After all, God is not an inefficient God. Why would He send Christ to die for someone who wasn't going to believe it anyway? But the Word of God clearly teaches in this passage and many others that Christ died for all.

I John 2:2 - "And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Christ's death was sufficient and is sufficient to pay for everyone's sins. Everyone could potentially be saved; there is no shortage of God's work on behalf of sin. Many who will end up in the fires of Hell wouldn't have to because Christ's death was sufficient even for them.

This is what makes the gospel "Good News." The sin has all been dealt with. It's like getting a notice from a billionaire who realizes that there are a lot of poor people in the world. He sets up a bank account and says whoever believes that he has this money can take out of this bank account to get them out of their poverty. Would that not be good news? Wouldn't that be a joyous responsibility to go to the poor and tell them, "You don't have to worry about where you're going live anymore or what you're going to eat. There's someone who has provided the money and has paid it sufficiently."

Some people would probably scoff at you. Yet that indeed is where we are in the ministry of reconciliation. Our job is to inform a poverty-stricken, spiritually-dead race of people that there is enough money in the bank. There is enough provision for sin so that they can be saved. Some will scoff and some won't believe that. They will say it's too good to be true; but it is true. God has provided it. That should motivate us.

The *third* motivating factor in verse 15 is the life of Christ, "And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." What life is He talking about? They which live spiritually. See Galatians 2:20 - "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." The life we have today is not our own life, spiritually speaking. The life we have is the life of Christ. Paul is saying that we should be motivated because of the life that has been given to us. Christ didn't die on the Cross to give you new life just so you could use it for your own interests. He didn't give you new life just so you could do what *you* want to do. He gave you that new life for a reason. The reason is, that you could go out and share it with others.

In verses 16 and 17, we see the new creation. These are perhaps the most significant verses in the Bible dispensationally speaking. Paul talks about knowing Christ after the flesh in verse 16 – “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more." I realize many interpret this statement simply to mean that they don’t look at Christ from a fleshly, unsaved view anymore. They would suggest that is all Paul is saying. Certainly, there is truth to that. We don't look at Christ from a fleshly viewpoint or an unsaved viewpoint anymore because we're saved now. But the context indicates that Paul has something entirely different in mind. Notice in verse 16 - "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh." He's not simply talking about the way we view men from a fleshly perspective or not, he's talking about the way we view men *in* their flesh. The difference that we see now, in this present dispensation, is that now God doesn't look at the fleshly distinctions of men. We don't look at the human race anymore like we used to when there were still distinctions between Jew and Gentile. Paul makes it very evident in his writings that there is no Jew or Greek, there is no bond or free, no male or female in Christ. All the world is in one condition before God. They are all concluded under sin.

We don't know Christ the same as when He walked this earth in the flesh. Yet most religious people only know Christ in His earthly life. Some of them don't even think of Christ as being deity. They think of Christ as only a good man or a good teacher or a prophet at best. But Paul says we don't look at Christ that way anymore. Other religious people and even many Christians look at Christ simply in His earthly life. They believe He's God come in the flesh, but they don't go

beyond that. They stay with His earthly ministry and they would bring us back under the Law and the Kingdom program. But Paul says we don't look at Christ that way anymore, and even if we did at one time, we don't anymore. We have a view of a risen Lord who has revealed a new dispensation.

In verse 17, he talks about being a new creature - "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Anytime you see a "therefore," you have to see what it's there for. Why did he say that? He's drawing a conclusion. Because we don't look at Christ in His earthly life anymore, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation." What's the new creation? The new creation *is the Body of Christ.* Ephesians says, "That He might take Jew and Gentile and make of the twain *one new man."* That is the new creation!

A lot of people interpret this entirely incorrectly. Some say that since you are a new creature in Christ, all the old things are passed away, your former life is gone. You might have been addicted to alcohol and drugs and cigarettes, but when you are saved, the Lord takes that all away from you. Thank God, many times that is the testimony of sincere believers and praise the Lord when He does remove from our lives these hindrances. But the simple fact is, sometimes it doesn't happen that way. That's not what this verse is talking about. This verse isn't saying that once you become a Christian, your entire past life will suddenly be gone and you will not be gripped with problems you used to have. He says that if any man be in Christ, old things are passed away. What old things? The old program, the old dispensation. All things are become new. We're in a new economy. We have a new way of looking at men, we have a new way of looking at Christ and we have a new entity, the Body of Christ that we've been placed into as believers.

In verses 18 and 19, we find the reconciliation - "And all things are of God." Again, I believe Paul still has this new program in mind. There is a sense in which all things have always been of God. Even in the Old Testament when people were saved, salvation was totally of God; and yet at that time, there were some differences from how it is now. There were responsibilities, there were rituals that people had to do to show their faith in God, to demonstrate that they were really believers. So today, in a very real sense, all things are of God in a way it has never been in the past.

Today there are no rituals or works that are given to demonstrate our faith. Today it is simply to believe that Christ died for your sins, was buried and rose again. All things are of God.

Then verse 18 continues, "Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." What does it mean to be reconciled? The word "reconciled" means to be changed thoroughly. There are several different ways that things have changed because of reconciliation.

First of all, *we* have been reconciled; we have been thoroughly changed. We used to be enemies of God, but now that we are saved, we are no longer enemies. We have changed our status before God and are now children of God. But Paul says something that has troubled many. In verse 19, "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." Some would teach, based on that statement, that all the world will be saved. We call that Universal Reconciliation. It's almost the opposite of limited atonement. Limited atonement says, Christ didn't die for some people, therefore, they could never be saved. Universal Reconciliation says that if Christ died for the whole world, they must all be saved. But it's simply not the teaching of Scripture.

Remember the word "reconcile" means to change status. Reconciliation is not a synonym or the same word as salvation. Every salvation does involve reconciliation, but not every reconciliation involves salvation. All verse 19 is saying is that the whole world changed status. Paul explains it in the next phrase, "not imputing their trespasses unto them." The way that the whole world changed status through the death of Christ was that now God was not imputing their trespasses against them.

Romans 5:13 - "For until the Law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law." Isn't this a beautiful principle? Are we under Law today? No, we're under Grace (Romans 6:14). Sin is not imputed when there is no law. How has the world changed its status in the Dispensation of Grace? We're not under the Law. Sin is not imputed. We have the blessed privilege of informing a lost world that God is not holding their sin against them anymore. It is no longer a sin question, but a Son question. It's not what you can do to get rid of your sins, it's do you believe what God already did with your sins? Do you believe it?

That's good news! Does that mean everybody is automatically saved? No. Even though Christ dealt with all those sins, it doesn't automatically save a person. They still have to believe it.

What's our ministry, our commission? Verse 18 says, "And hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." The last half of verse 19 says, "And hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." That's closer to the word "commission" than you'll find in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There's our Grace Commission. Our job is to try to bring about a reconciliation. You have two people who are at odds with each other and want to get them together. The joy we have is to inform the world that God has already done His part. Now you believe and that will complete the reconciliation.

Verses 20 and 21 - "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ." The word "ambassador" was used in Paul's day as a legal representative or official. That's the same sense we use the word today. We send ambassadors to different parts of the world to represent our nation to their nation. Philippians 3:20 says, "For our

conversation (citizenship) is in Heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." We are citizens of Heaven, but that's not where we live. We live on earth. Why? Because we are ambassadors. God has left us here as ambassadors to a foreign and sometimes hostile nation, to represent God to them. *First* of all, we must represent reconciliation loyally. We have to be loyal to our home nation. We have to be faithful to represent God in an accurate way. "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." We had better be careful how we represent salvation to the world. We are speaking for God. The only word from God that people may hear will be from your lips.

Secondly, we need to be loving. Verse 20 goes on, "We pray you (we beg you) in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." We must somehow convey to the lost the urgency of salvation and do it in a loving way. We have to remind them in a loving way that if they are not reconciled to God, they will spend an eternity in the fires of Hell.

Third, we need to represent reconciliation logically. Verse 21 - "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Many have the idea that faith and reason are not compatible. That's unfortunate. We cannot argue or reason someone into salvation. But that doesn't mean that faith isn't reasonable, because it is. It's very reasonable. It's a very logical plan that God came up with. "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." The Scripture says the wages of sin is death. Someone has to die. Even though our sins aren't being imputed to us, we still have that connection to Father Adam. We still have that sin problem that we inherited. It has to be dealt with. The wages of sin is death. So the logic of it is this: God has figured out a way for someone else to die for your sin problem. But it wasn't just anybody, it was someone who knew no sin. Why is that so important? Could I die for your sin? No! I've got my own sins to worry about. I've got my own relationship to Adam to worry about. But if God in His wisdom could come up with a way for someone to be perfect, who had no sin, He could die for your sin. Very logical, isn't it?

Then he goes on to say, "That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Two of Paul's favorite words are - *in Him.* In Christ. We are not the righteousness of God in ourselves. We are only the righteousness of God in Christ. I call that the great exchange. It's the best deal ever offered on the face of the earth. Trade in your sins for righteousness. Trade in your relationship to a fallen race and utter depravity for perfect righteousness. That's a good deal! Yet, how many people have ever heard of it, let alone believe in it?

There are some practical considerations in this whole matter of being an ambassador for Christ. *First* of all, there are some who say they are too shy to talk to people about Christ. Here are a few thoughts for you. You don't have to be a great orator. God has not called everyone to be preachers, missionaries or

great speakers. But you can begin by simply planting seeds. That's one of the principles of Scripture.

What's the most common topic that's ever been discussed? The weather: ever since the Flood when bad weather started entering into the picture. "Beautiful day, isn't it?" "Yes, wonderful." It would be just as easy to say, "Yes, isn't the Lord wonderful." Just drop that in. But you say, "That's not the gospel." But it's a start. It's a little seed. But what if the weather's rotten? "The Lord gives us what we need, doesn't He? Rain and shine." You can turn the conversation around to the Lord. That doesn't mean you sit right down and give the whole gospel. Get comfortable with using God's name with a purpose. Make others sensitive to the fact that there is a God and He is concerned.

A second consideration is, how much does someone need to know to be saved. What is the minimum requirement someone has to know to be saved? Remember three words: sin, provision, response. The human race has to understand that they are in a real predicament. That's why the Apostle Paul emphasizes over and over again, "ALL have sinned and have come short of the glory of God." "The wages of sin is death." We have to make sure they understand their need.

If they already understand that, you come to the second part - provision. That's the gospel itself: the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. They need to understand that God has provided for dealing with sin. He did that through Christ, the finished work on the Cross.

Response - they need to understand that they must come to a point where they personally believe and put their trust in that message - not in anything they've done.

A third consideration is: Must I bring a person to a crisis point of decision? We often hear that you have to personally pray, or you have to come to the front of the auditorium, or you have to kneel, etc. Only the Lord can bring somebody to the point of decision. You'll never bring someone to the point of decision; that's not your job. The frustration in life comes from trying to do someone else's job. Our job is to be ministers of reconciliation, bringing the word of reconciliation. God's job is to bring that person to the point of decision. That's what the Holy Spirit's job is: conviction of the Holy Spirit. I fear that too many people have been convicted by a preacher, but not by the Holy Spirit. There's a real danger there. Yet we need to be sensitive. Maybe the Holy Spirit is convicting them right when we're dealing with them. Be sensitive to that.

There will be millions of people in Hell who prayed a prayer. But there will not be one person in Hell who fully put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't that a beautiful thought? So what should be our goal? When we minister to someone, should our goal be to get them to pray a prayer, or to get them to put their trust in

the finished work of Christ? There's nothing wrong with praying a prayer. An appropriate prayer would be thanking the Lord for the salvation He has provided and that they believed. Should we try to get them to pray the sinner's prayer? "Lord, be merciful to me." We had better not pray that one; that's not for this dispensation. That's before Grace, under Law. That's saying, "Be propitious to me, Lord. Meet me at the mercy seat." Yet, Paul says that God has already been propitious; He's already satisfied with what Christ did. He's already been merciful to us.

Study Questions:

1. What is one of our greatest privileges as members of the Body of Christ?

2. What are God's two great desires in I Timothy 2:4, which make up our commission?

3. List and explain the three sources of motivation for our commission as found in II Corinthians 5:14-15.

4. What does it mean to know Christ after the flesh? (II Cor. 5:16, 17)

5. What don't we know Him that way any more?

6. What is verse 17 *not* referring to?

7. What *is* verse 17 speaking of?

8. What is reconciliation? (II Cor. 5:18, 19)

9. In what way has the world been reconciled to God?

10. What is our ministry and commission?

11. What is an ambassador? (II Cor. 5:20, 21)

12. How should we present reconciliation?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

OUR GRACE COMMISSION
Part II

“And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the Mystery, which from the beginning was hid in God, Who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:9).

During the Spanish-American War in 1898, the United States government decided to aid the Cubans who were attempting to throw off the Spanish government. They chose a certain lieutenant named Rowan to deliver a message to the general of the forces, whose name was Garcia. A writer took this story and wrote an essay, put it in the newspaper and the story inspired so many that it was printed in pamphlet form. A total of 40,000,000 pamphlets were finally printed outlining this story which was entitled, "A Message to Garcia."

The thing that made this story so popular and inspiring was that it portrayed the dedication of a man who was faithful to a message. He knew he had a message to deliver and there were times he didn't even know where Garcia was located. Yet he very faithfully carried out his responsibility, making sure that the message got through.

We have been considering the subject of the Mystery, that sacred secret that was committed to the Apostle Paul. The Mystery, in a sense, is our message to Garcia. It is as though we have a special message that is entrusted to us which must be delivered. It is highly important that it gets through. We're going to see that the Apostle Paul instructs us as to the importance of getting this message across.

There are two parts to our Grace Commission: the *first* is reconciliation found in II Corinthians 5, and the *second* is to make all men see what is the fellowship or Dispensation of the Mystery. Remember, I Timothy 2:4 says, it is God's desire or His will for "all men to be saved, *and* to come unto the knowledge of the truth." That really outlines our two-fold responsibility: to see that all men are saved - that's the ministry of reconciliation. Then to see that all men come to the knowledge of the truth - that's making all men see what is the Dispensation of the Mystery.

At this point I need to issue a warning. *Caution* - Satan hates the Mystery. If you get involved in the ministry of the Mystery for this age, you can expect Satanic

opposition. There's a real important reason for that. If you preach Law and try to bring believers back under the Law of Moses, or back under bondage, that's fine with Satan. He'd like to see you do that. If you preach ritual and religious rigmarole, you can preach all kinds of that, and Satan will not be dissatisfied with that at all. But when you start preaching the Gospel of Grace according to the Mystery, Satan gets nervous.

Why is this? If you preach the Law and the Kingdom, you're preaching God's earthly program. But Satan's heart is really in the heavenlies. He wanted to ascend up above the heights. He wanted to ascend up and be like the Most High. While we know Satan has his hands in earthly things, he really has his heart in the heavenlies. Ephesians 6:12 - "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." That word for "high" is the same as for "heavenlies." That is why Satan wants us to become embroiled in earthly battles.

He knows that if he can distract us and be concerned only with earthly battles, we're missing the real battle field in God's program today, and that is the heavenly places. That's where our area of ministry is according to the Mystery. The height of spiritual warfare is making all men see what is the Dispensation of the Mystery.

Paul, the preacher, was given a responsibility of steward in Ephesians 3:7-9 - "Whereof I was made a minister." To understand what he means when he says "whereof," we have to understand what he was talking about in the first six verses because that is what he is referring to. In verse 2 he says, "If ye have heard of the Dispensation of the Grace of God." That is the official title of this present age - the Dispensation of the Grace of God. In verse 3, he says, "How that by revelation He made known unto me the Mystery." The Mystery, of course, refers to the contents of the message that pertains to the Dispensation (or the economy, the house law) of the Grace of God. Then he says, "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge." He's referring back to chapter 2 where he explains how we used to be alienated from Israel, but now in Christ, under the new dispensation, we have been brought in and God has made one new man - the Body of Christ. Then he goes on to say in verse 6, "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel."

So when he says, "Whereof I was made a minister," he's referring back to the Mystery and back to that special dispensation that was committed unto him.

How did Paul become a minister of the Mystery? Verse 7 tells us, "According to the gospel of the grace of God." That is a reference to his unique apostleship. God, through His grace, gave Paul a position of authority in the Body of Christ.

That position is that of Apostle of the Gentiles. How was it given? The verse continues, "by the effectual working of His power."

Paul never forgot who he was before he was saved. Paul was a stubborn, rebellious individual. He knew the power it must have taken to change him. One of the most difficult things to do is to change an individual. We can change the way a person looks very easily; that's not difficult. But it's very difficult to change a person from the inside out. But that's what God did in salvation. It's God's power that enables us to serve Him. If we want to serve God, we have to do it in His power. If we're not doing it in His power, it really isn't useful in God's program.

Paul also says he is less than the least of all saints in verse 8 - "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given." Again, we have to understand what grace he is talking about. Paul is being somewhat modest here. This is not a false humility, he is truly being modest. Paul was truly a humble individual. As I pointed out, he wasn't always this way. He was a very proud individual at one time. But God has ways to humble us. In Paul's case, he used a physical infirmity. Paul makes the statement in II Corinthians 12, that God allowed a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to buffet him lest he should be exalted above measure because of the abundance of the revelations. As God gave revelations to Paul, there was that tendency in his flesh to be proud. But God gave him the thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. God has ways to keep us humble. He can give us a thorn in the flesh. We should be able to say with Paul that we rejoice in infirmities. "When we are weak, we are strong." What did Paul mean when he said that? It simply means that when we are weak and we realize that we cannot do anything in our own strength, that is when we look to the Lord. So infirmities serve to humble us.

In verses 8 and 9, he talks about the stewardship - "Is this grace given, that...." "That" gives us a purpose clause. He's going to give us the reason or purpose that God is doing this. "...that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." He is not talking about saving grace here, but about the grace to carry out his ministry: specifically, the Dispensation of Grace. God gave Paul the job of dispensing, of being the administrator, in this present age.

How does he describe and define the Mystery? In two ways: *first* of all, in verse 8 - "unsearchable." The word "unsearchable" literally means "untraceable" or "untrackable." You are unable to track the Mystery down in the Old Testament. You can't trace it back there because it wasn't revealed back there. There are no footprints or types or pictures of the Mystery or of this dispensation anywhere in the Old Testament. You can't trace the Mystery back to the Four Gospels when Christ was on earth. Of course, He was God and He knew the secret, but He wasn't revealing it yet.

Then Paul says, "the unsearchable riches." We are so prone to think of riches simply in terms of material things. That's perhaps a result of society around us. Paul isn't thinking of that kind of riches at all, he's thinking of spiritual riches. In Ephesians 1, you have perhaps the greatest list of spiritual blessings you will find all in one chapter in the entire Word of God. In Ephesians 1:7, he calls them "the riches of His grace." We are chosen in Him, in Christ. We have that blessed position of being chosen and predestinated unto the adoption of children. We have that blessed privilege of being considered God's own children. We have forgiveness of sins and the fact that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, and on and on.

These riches were never revealed in the Old Testament. They are the kinds of things you can't go back and find fully revealed and developed like Paul does. You have forgiveness of sins to a degree, but you don't have it back in the Old Testament like you do in this dispensation. You certainly don't have the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit spoken of back there, plus many other things as well.

In verse 9, we have the heart of Paul's mission - "To make all men see what is the fellowship of the Mystery." The word "fellowship" in the Greek is the word "kononia" found in the Textus Receptus. That's why the King James translators translated it "fellowship." But the majority text has the word "oikonomia" for "dispensation" or "economy." In this context, I believe that the flow or teaching of the Word of God would support the majority text reading, not the Textus Receptus.

What is the Dispensation of the Mystery and where did it come from? Paul says, "Which hath been hid in God." The Mystery was not hidden away in the Old Testament, it was hid in God. It was in the mind of God all of these years, and revealed to the Apostle Paul.

At the end of verse 9, it says, "Who created all things by Jesus Christ." Why does Paul bring up the subject of creation at the end of verse 9? What does this have to do with the Dispensation of the Mystery? God created not only material things like the earth, the sun and the stars; He also created the ages. Hebrews 1:2 tells us that God created the ages by His Son, "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds." The word for "world" is "eon" or "age." That is teaching us that Christ created not only the material world, but He created the ages. He created the dispensations.

When we hear people saying that God did not create the world and did not create man and things evolved, we get pretty nervous. That is denying the creative hand of God. And yet many people deny the Dispensation of the Mystery and they are just as guilty of denying the creative hand of God as are the evolutionists.

Paul recognized the Mystery as a sacred trust. As Paul grew old, he needed to find someone who would be faithful to carry on the ministry of the Gospel of the Grace of God. He knew just the man - Timothy. Paul writes to Timothy and very sternly reminds him of his great responsibility before God. I Timothy 1:11 - "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust." I Timothy 6:20 - "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust," (Paul is passing the trust on) "avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called." Keep that sacred trust. That same sacred trust has been handed over to us. Are we determined to get it out and to communicate it, regardless of the cost?

The Church has been given the responsibility of being a teacher of these things. Ephesians 3:10-11 - "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God." The principalities and powers are seats of authority God has established throughout the universe. Some are heavenly and some are earthly. Today, many of these are occupied by fallen angels. That's why we referred to the verse earlier that we are battling against principalities and powers in heavenly places.

The Church is a teacher to the principalities and powers. Do you realize what that is saying? Not only do we have a responsibility to make all men see what is the Dispensation of the Mystery; we have an obligation to actually teach the angels about the grace of God.

The angels can read about the Mystery just as we can. But there's a difference between reading about the Mystery and seeing the grace of God played out in real life. That is the sense that Paul says the Church becomes a teacher to angels.

I have a friend in Pella, Iowa, who works for Pella Windows designing machines to make windows. One time he invited me up to his office where he was working on designing a new machine on his computer. They don't use drawing boards anymore. I said, "That's very nice, but I would like to see the thing work." So he took me down to see the machine in all actuality. Which do you think was more exciting to see, a few little lines on a video screen or this robot machine in action? There's no comparison. That's the way it is with the Mystery. The angels can sit down and read about the Mystery on paper and it probably sounds great, but what really excites them is seeing the grace of God and the Mystery in action: seeing it in the lives of people. I would suggest that's the most powerful way that we can communicate the Mystery to people around us. We need not only to tell them what it is on paper, but to show them how it works in real life.

I Peter 1:12 - "The angels desire to look into the things concerning salvation." Why do the angels want to look at salvation? You have to understand that there is no record in Scripture of the angels ever being given an opportunity to be saved. We are told that a third of the angels fell with Satan, but there's no record

that Christ died for their sins. Indeed, in Hebrews we are told that Christ did not take on the nature of angels, but He took on the seed of Abraham, the nature of man. That tells us that Christ couldn't have died for angels if He hadn't become an angel. So to an angel, it's very interesting to see how God could take a fallen being and restore him to a position of perfection before God, which is what He has done in His grace. The angels are very curious about this.

Verse 11 - "According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." That verse literally reads "according to the purpose of the ages." What's the purpose of the ages? It's always been salvation through Christ. It hasn't always been revealed as clearly as it has now, but it's always been God's purpose to bring about salvation in Christ. So the best way to teach grace is to live grace so people can see it at work.

In verse 12, we see our confidence, "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him." This serves as an illustration of Paul's point. Paul just said that you, the Church, have the opportunity of teaching grace to angels. Here is one way you can do it: by entering in with confidence into the very presence of God, and we do that by prayer.

How can prayer teach grace to angels? In the Old Testament, you didn't just march in and talk to God. In fact, you didn't just march in and talk to the king. Remember the Book of Esther when she went in with fear and trembling before King Ahasuerus? He could have ordered her head cut off. The high priest couldn't just enter into the Most Holy anytime he wanted. And he couldn't enter in just any old way he pleased. He had to do it with blood. All the way through the Old Testament, we see this barrier of access to God and it's only in this Dispensation of Grace that we see access to God being opened up the way it is now. That is an illustration of grace. Every time we pray, we illustrate before the spirit world, the access we have been given by grace. That's why Paul said to pray without ceasing!

In verse 13, Paul concludes, "Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory." What do Paul's tribulations have to do with the Mystery? He was experiencing imprisonment. I would suggest that the reason Paul says, in the light of what I've just said about the Mystery and your responsibility to make it known, and my responsibility to make it known - in the light of all that, don't faint at my tribulations because my imprisonment is actually playing a part in this commission.

The Apostle Paul received and recorded the very height of the Mystery when he was in prison. We're not suggesting that the Mystery wasn't around before that. Paul had received revelation concerning the Mystery in his earlier epistles, such as Corinthians and Romans. But it's not until you get to his prison epistles that you find the Mystery being unfolded in all its fullness and all it's splendor. That's why Paul says not to be concerned with my tribulations because they are actually

serving to accomplish his major goal and responsibility in life - making all men see what is the Dispensation of the Mystery. Indeed, we have the fruit of it here today. We rejoice in the Books of Ephesians and Colossians, where we see the full revelation of that Mystery being made known. In verses 14 to 21, Paul follows up with a prayer, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now he's going to pray after he's told us our responsibility and the ministry he had of making all men see, that we really understand this Mystery. Verse 16 - "That he would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" (many say "of the love of Christ," but that's not how it reads; He's just been talking about the Mystery) "and to know the love of Christ." There he's bringing up another subject. So it is Paul's prayer that we fully comprehend the Mystery.

That tells us something about our commission. You can never fully discharge your duty to make all men see what is the Dispensation of the Mystery, if you don't understand it yourself or if you don't have a good comprehension and love for the truth that God has revealed to us. That's why it is important to teach and equip the saints so they might be able to go out and tell others as well.

Verse 20 - "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church." You see, that's God's area of ministry. "By Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

So, as the Apostle Paul was given the message of the Mystery, the ministry of reconciliation, the responsibility of making all men see the Dispensation of the Mystery; so he passed it on to Timothy and he passes it on to us. I hope you are better equipped to carry out that responsibility in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Study Questions:

1. What are the two parts of OUR Grace Commission?
2. Why does Satan hate the Mystery?
3. How does Paul describe himself in Ephesians 3:7 & 8a?
4. How does Paul describe the Mystery in Ephesians 3:8?
5. What does Paul mean by “the fellowship of the Mystery”?
6. Why does Paul end Ephesians 3:9, “who created all things by Jesus Christ”?
7. What amazing responsibility do we have according to Ephesians 3:10?
8. How can we best carry this out?
9. How does Ephesians 3:12 illustrate Paul’s point?
10. How does Ephesians 3:13 put Paul’s imprisonment in perspective?